FRANK MILLER TALKS

#113

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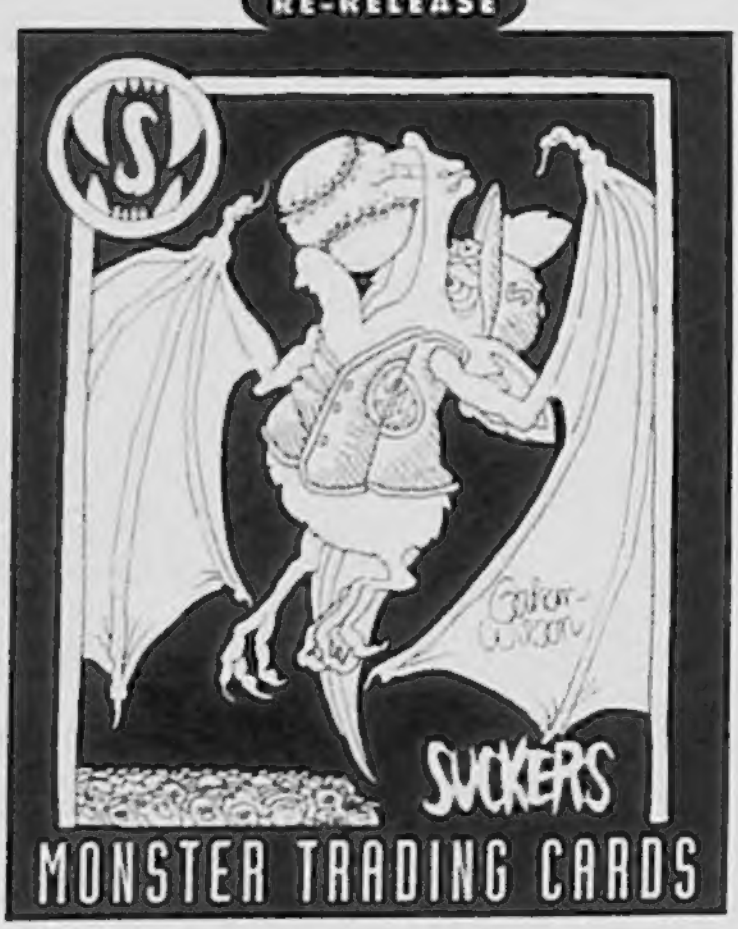

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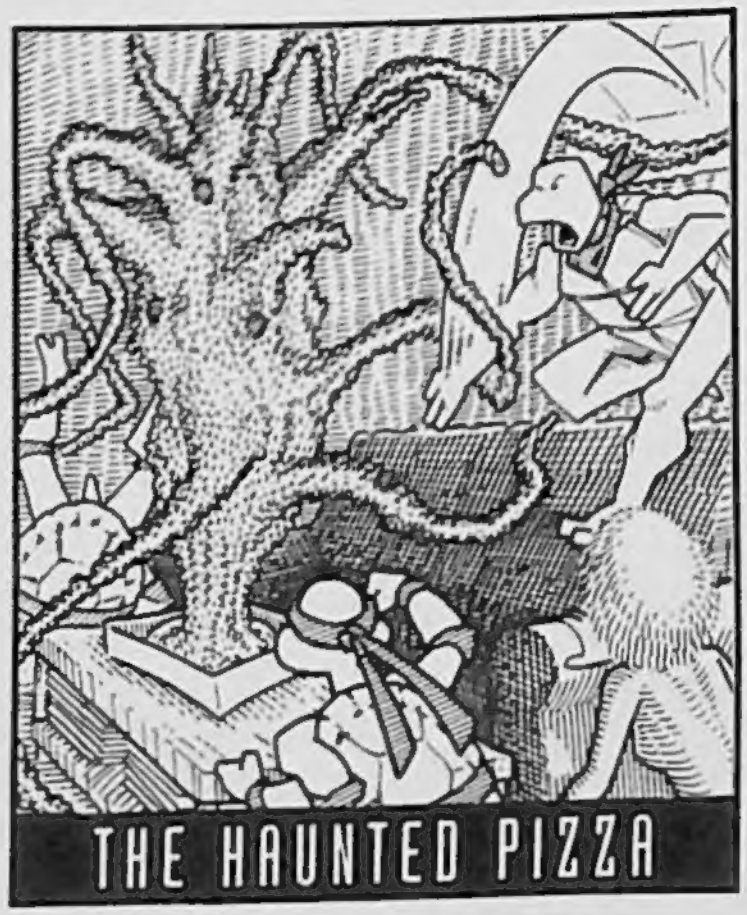

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cover contributed by:
FRANK MILLER
art: SIN CITY

UP FRONT

CROSS-CULTURAL COLLABORATIONS

One of the great talents that comes to mind when I think of black-and-white art in the comics medium is the artist, **Alberto Breccia,** born 1926 in Buenos Aires, Argentina. Over his long and definitely illustrious career, he has done many collaborations, among them MORT CINDER and **PERRAMUS.**

And talking of great black-and-white art, have you seen **Frank Miller's** SIN CITY? Frank's impressive commitment to staying motivated and juiced in this field just keeps taking him higher and higher. **Miller's** SIN CITY is a solo endeavor, but his many other comics projects are all collaborations.

I know from previous interviews that Frank is a great fan of manga —in fact, he conducted an interview with collaborators **Kazuo Koike** and **Goseki Kojima** for us back in COMICS INTERVIEW #52. These two Japanese gentlemen are masters of manga.

Not too many years ago, the British "invasion" of U.S. comics would have sounded unlikely, maybe even outlandish. Now "hands across the water" collaborations are the norm. In the future, we may look forward to seeing more U.S. and Italian, French, South American and even Japanese collaborations.

With all the wonderful creative talent in comics around the world, wouldn't that be fun? Think of the possibilities!

— Julia R. Mather
International
Marketing Director

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"Perhaps there is a bit of a pessimist in me."

FRANK

From SIN CITY.

MILLER

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"As I got more freedom, I had to start articulating

Shortly after the nights turned dark in Los Angeles, I had a chance to interview L.A. denizen Frank Miller, a man who — as a celebrated graphic artist/writer/screenwriter — casts a particularly long shadow. Miller's importance in the comics field can hardly be overstated — an assertion easily defended, given the fact that his distinct influence has already spread into the broader world of American film and television. Let's return to THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS, then turn to SIN CITY, TERMINATOR VS. ROBOCOP and Frank Miller's various other pending star turns, in turn . . .

DAN HAGEN: *This is kind of a strange question, but maybe not as stupid as it sounds. Did it ever occur to you what Batman might have done in L.A. during recent events?*

FRANK MILLER: *(Pause.)* Oh, yeah. I mean, now that you mention it, it occurs to me. Because, if you look at it, he handled very similar events in Gotham. He basically formed a vigilante gang and, as he does inside himself, he turned the sort of Dionysian, horrific force into something that would bring order.

DAN: *Seeing those helicopter shots of people being pulled out of cars and beaten, with no police around, I thought, "There's where he would be, right down there." Or perhaps he would have beaten up the cops a year ago.* (Laughter.)

FRANK: Well, whatever he would have done, he would have meant it. One particularly interesting incident that had not been played up in the media is that there is one grocery store in town that initially had its windows broken. And I don't remember which gang, but a certain local gang occupied the store and fended the looters off all night — and then returned it to the owners.

DAN: *Wow. That's great.*

FRANK: And that's really straight out of DARK KNIGHT.

DAN: *Indeed it is. You know, sometimes you take to heart, I think, a lot of people's criticisms of these characters, and say, "It's too silly to think about this in the real world." But when the events in L.A. occur — or yesterday, when the miners were trapped, I thought, "If only there were a Superman . . ."*

FRANK: Well, I got a number of calls from all over the world during the riots, because they came very, very close to where I live. At one point, in fact, I was looking at 10 fires out through my own window. And one smart-ass crack that I had to make to just about everybody who called is that they no longer could call my work "dark."

DAN: (Laughter.) *They have to call it absolutely neutral. Exactly. Does that feel a little spooky, having written about something that has a parallel in life?*

FRANK: I wasn't very surprised. I'm more surprised when things like that don't happen. Perhaps there is a bit of a pessimist in me. I mean, I've often been amazed that anybody obeys street lights.

DAN: *Me, too. And the French don't, they tell me.*

FRANK: *(Laughter.)* No, the way the French drive is all their own.

DAN: *I remember a friend of mine telling me he was over there in a French cab. It was late at night, there was no traffic. The guy zips through the stop light, and the passenger says, "You just ran that light." And the Frenchman says, "I am a rational man. That is a machine. It cannot tell me what to do." A refreshing attitude.*

FRANK: Yeah.

DAN: *By the way, have you read THE ROMANTIC MANIFESTO by Ayn Rand?*

FRANK: I certainly have, yeah.

DAN: *I was wondering, because some of your remarks in previous interviews sounded as if you'd read it.*

FRANK: Well, I read it back in high school, but it made a very big impression. It was the first text I'd read that defined the hero in literary terms, and heroic fiction as a legitimate form of fiction, rather than an outdated one.

DAN: *I was entranced with it in high school, too. That's the first book that started me reading all of her others.*

FRANK: That's an interesting entry one. Most people start with THE FOUNTAINHEAD.

Robocop TM & ©1992 Orion Pictures / The Terminator TM & ©1984 Cinema '84.

precisely what it was that I wanted to do with it."

DAN: *I went on to that, and enjoyed it a lot.*

FRANK: To a certain extent, I think that THE FOUNTAINHEAD may have been her finest work, because I think ATLAS SHRUGGED tended to collapse under its own weight.

FRANK: Did you read that whole John Galt speech, by the way?

FRANK: Oh, yeah.

DAN: *Really? Even I never have.*

FRANK: I don't think she understood how well her ideas were getting across in ATLAS SHRUGGED. She was almost like a comic-book writer who uses too many captions, you know — *(laughter)* — when the pictures are already doing the job.

DAN: *With ROMANTIC MANIFESTO, I thought, "This is what I've been longing for, all these years, without knowing it."*

FRANK: I wouldn't have picked that book, of all, to point to as a moment of *satori* necessarily, but I do know that I've recalled things that I probably read in it. I was more or less forced to articulate what I wanted out of my work, but I spent most of the first few years of my career just shooting from the hip — you know, going by my instincts and writing and drawing with adrenalin. And as I got more freedom, I had to start articulating, more and more, what it was I wanted to do. Because you can thrash like a child, working for Marvel or DC. And when I got to DARK KNIGHT, I knew that I wanted to do something that was, well, more than just another adventure.

DAN: *I reread that last night, by the way, and I cannot express how impressed I am.*

FRANK: *(Laughter.)* Well, thank you.

DAN: *And not only that, but, according to COMICS INTERVIEW #100, you're the No. 10 Power In Comics!* (Laughter.) *Even Harlan Ellison finds you impressive, and he's notoriously hard to please. Well, let's see, where do we go from here? First, TERMINATOR-ROBOCOP, I guess. Tell me about that.*

FRANK: Well, it was **Mike Richardson's** idea, so it's all his fault. No, it's a four-issue series. **Walt Simonson's** illustrating. And it's exactly what it sounds like.

Throughout my career, as I've gotten more and more into creating work that doesn't owe to the superheroes, every once in a while I like to recalibrate and work on something that is to that audience, with that kind of material. Because I have great affection for the material. And when this was offered, I found it kind of irresistible. It was an opportunity, for one thing, for me to use a number of ideas that hadn't made it into all my drafts for ROBOCOPS 2 and 3. But mostly, it was an opportunity to work with Walter. I don't believe in saying *too* much about my stories before they come out . . .

DAN: *Sure. Just give me a hint along these lines. It seems to me that a battle between Robocop and Terminator would be unbalanced in favor of Terminator. Is there anything you can say about that?*

FRANK: Yes, that is addressed. You're referring mainly to the fact that Terminator is made by future technology?

DAN: *Right.*

FRANK: The one thing the Terminators aren't big on is shrewdness, creative thinking. And the other is that any Terminator-Robocop contest is, by nature, a time-travel story. And anything can happen in time-travel stories. Just about everything that could, does, in this one.

DAN: *I'll be looking forward to seeing it. Anything else you'd like to say about it?*

FRANK: Well, mainly, that I've now got the completed art on the first issue, and the pencil art on the second, and that what Walter's doing is just breathtaking. His visualizations of the characters are superb — very dramatic, very dynamic. This isn't one of those books that looks like someone simply got a lot of photographs out. Like a good cartoonist will, he interpreted these characters and put them in another medium, taking advantage of what was good about them . . .

DAN: *I never realized it, but you're right. That tends to be a trap you get when characters come from movies and TV, I suppose, right? People might automatically render them too realistically?*

FRANK: Yeah, you can be trapped by your reference. I can cite one other example offhand that is a job it seems nobody saw, that **Gil Kane** did of STAR TREK. He cartooned each of those characters and turned them into comic-book characters, beautifully capturing the likenesses, but making me go, "Wow!

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Writer vs. artist: "Those debates are . . . criminal."

SIN CITY TM & ©1991/92 Frank Miller.

"Certainly, the hero in SIN CITY is not a childhood icon of mine."

A comic!" Not, "Oh. There's a drawing of William Shatner."

DAN: *He's always been one of my favorites, Kane.*

FRANK: Oh, yeah! He's terrific. But the other thing about working on this is that I've known Walter and we have been colleagues and friends for a frighteningly long time. And I've always admired his work, and his talent as a storyteller. But it's very different when you actually work with somebody, and working over his pictures, which is the manner that he preferred to work on this — I'll write a plot, he draws the pictures and I write the final script.

DAN: *The old Marvel method.*

FRANK: Yeah. But working this way, and actually having my hands on his pages, I have been thrilled. He writes with his pictures. Writing on his pages is an absolute luxury. He even throws in those little moments that you might not have thought of. As someone who draws a lot of my own work, I have a special appreciation for someone who can tell a story that well.

DAN: *Yeah. I think you talked on that videotape with Harlan Ellison about the writer/artist thing. What's your current thinking on that? You're both. What's the balance in the industry?*

FRANK: In what terms?

DAN: *Writer vs. artist. As collaborators. It seems to me that these days the artist is the star, the one who calls the shots.*

FRANK: But a couple of years ago, the most popular talent in comics was **Alan Moore.** I think that those kinds of debates are . . . criminal. You cannot apply any rule to every collaboration. I have been in collaborations where I've been clearly the dominant, and others where my partner has been dominant. Collaboration should definitely be approached with a sense of generosity, and I believe in a flexibility. When I was working on HARD-BOILED and saw the first issue, I rewrote and un-wrote virtually everything I'd done. Because I realized that this book was Geoff's show, and that I was the straight man. I've been through a number of collaborations. No two are alike. To be perfectly honest, I think what you're asking there is in reference to the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE debate that went on.

DAN: *Which I'm not terribly familiar with, but . . .?*

FRANK: Oh, okay. That, I think, that was the genesis of it. Basically, it was a rather s[illegible] little squabble over money. And we're better than that.

DAN: *Well, the question doesn't greatly interest me, myself. I'm interested in the final product, as a consumer of it, I suppose. If it's good, it's good. But it just sort of intrigues me in your case, because you can do them both. Have you never been tempted to say, "I'm my own show. The hell with the rest of you"? I think I might be.*

FRANK: Well, I've only ever once been my own show, and that's the book I just finished, SIN CITY. It's the only thing I've ever done every inch of. People might wrongly think that some of my books have been all me, but I think that mainly comes from the fact that I've been the name that's gotten the attention, and some of my collaborators have not been given proper credit. **Klaus Janson** and **Lynn Varley** on DARK KNIGHT, for instance. And especially **Lynn Varley** on ELEKTRA LIVES AGAIN, which was such a tight collaboration. The line work on it had none of that volume or lighting that she brought to it. Entire scenes were vastly reinterpreted in her hands. But SIN CITY is the first thing I've done head-to-toe, and frankly it has been an utter, crazy joy. I only finished four days ago, and I miss it. And I want to start the

"The writer can be a force on a film, the director

has more power — and the studio is god!"

next one.

DAN: *It's a drug, eh?*

FRANK: It was one of those projects that just seemed charmed, I think mainly because I've been waiting to do it since I was about 14 years old. It's the kind of comics that I did — I hope not as well — back when I was an amateur.

DAN: *Does doing a project lead to ideas for other projects? Do you have a giant stack of ideas you want to get to, or . . .?*

FRANK: Always. By the time I finished SIN CITY, I had the second SIN CITY novel pretty much mapped out. And it's a very different story, but it simply takes place in the same town.

DAN: *What about the screenwriting, then? How does that fit in?*

FRANK: Well, that's still ongoing.

DAN: *So do you try to alternate projects, or just whatever comes up next . . .?*

FRANK: A little too often, it's whenever something is due. For instance, today I am working on a screenplay. That's a very exciting field. I'm not as at home there . . .

DAN: *I think of it as exciting, too, and somewhat unsung.*

FRANK: Yeah, a screenwriter is a bit of a punching bag, because the tension surrounding any movie production is so high. But it's a very different way of working, it's a very different kind of work. There's certainly nothing more exciting, or more frustrating.

DAN: *Isn't the screenplay the skeleton upon which a movie is hung, at least, no matter how "auteur" the director?*

FRANK: It's the blueprint, no matter what else is said. And working in film is an exercise in tenacity. Because the writer can be a force on a film, but the director has a great deal more power — and the studio is god! *(Laughter.)* In every film that I've worked on. They will get what they want. But even so, you have to be part diplomat and part warrior. It's real hard for me to describe, because I'd have to sum up so many situations I've been in, some that have been wonderful, some horrible.

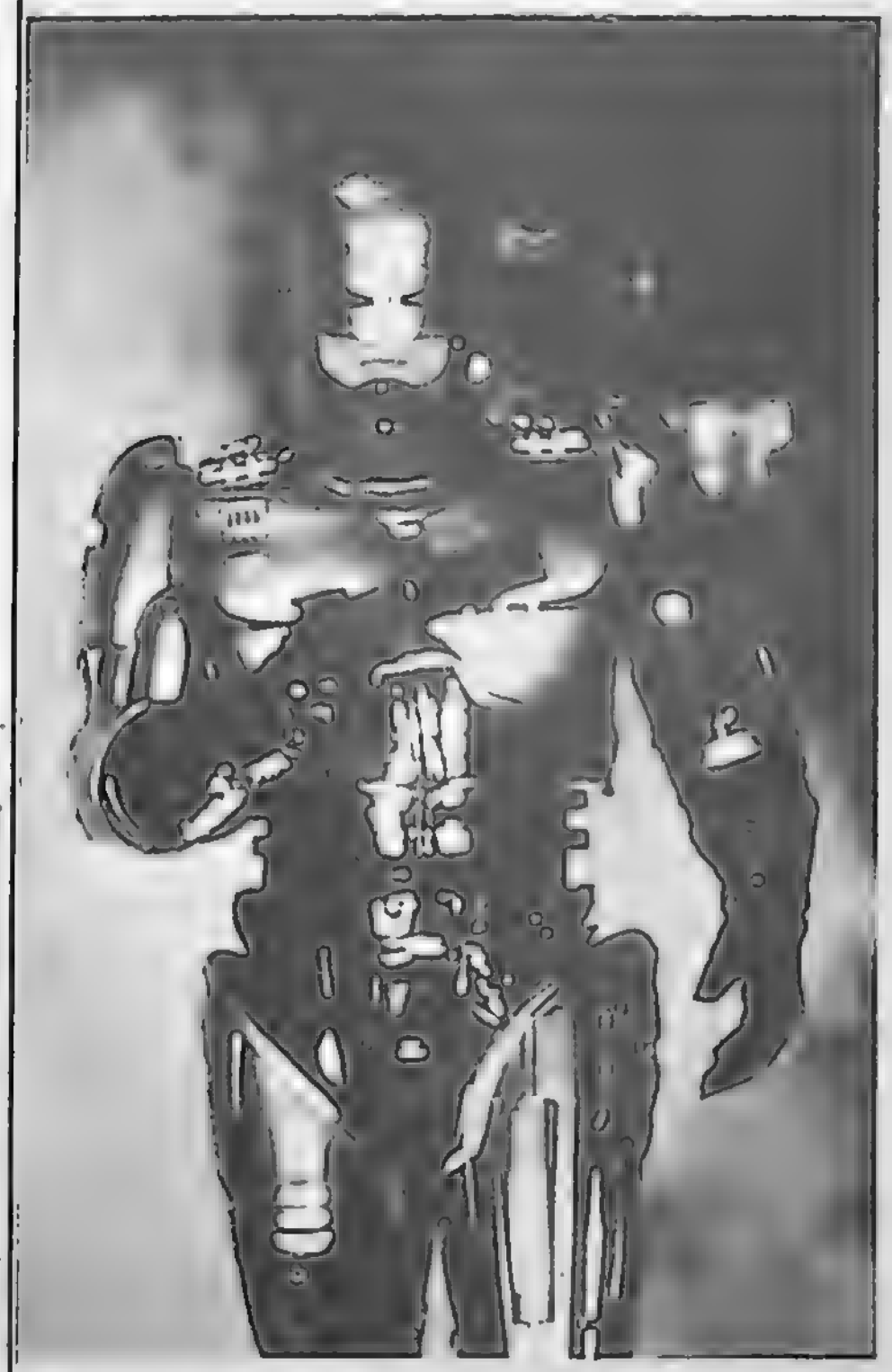
DAN: *Are you one of the screenwriters who prefers to meet the actors, or not?*

FRANK: Well, what I would prefer to do is direct them. *(Laughter.)* Everybody at work in this field knows that simply being a screenwriter is not a route toward seeing your own vision through. I like actors. I think I've worked well with them . . .

DAN: *People always tell me that, if you're a screenwriter, the actors will come to you and say, "Can you do something with this? Something with that?" Everybody's got their little bit they want to do, and you've got 50 people coming at you at once, unless you're careful. Do you find that true?*

FRANK: There's a lot of that, there's a lot of that. But since my career up until working in film was one of, certainly, a lot of collaboration, yet work that was essentially done alone, and by and large came out without major change — to be in a situation on the set, which is almost like community theatre, where there are all those egos, all those arguments, there's something invigorating about

First stills from soon-to-be-released ROBOCOP 3 movie, screenplay by Frank Miller.



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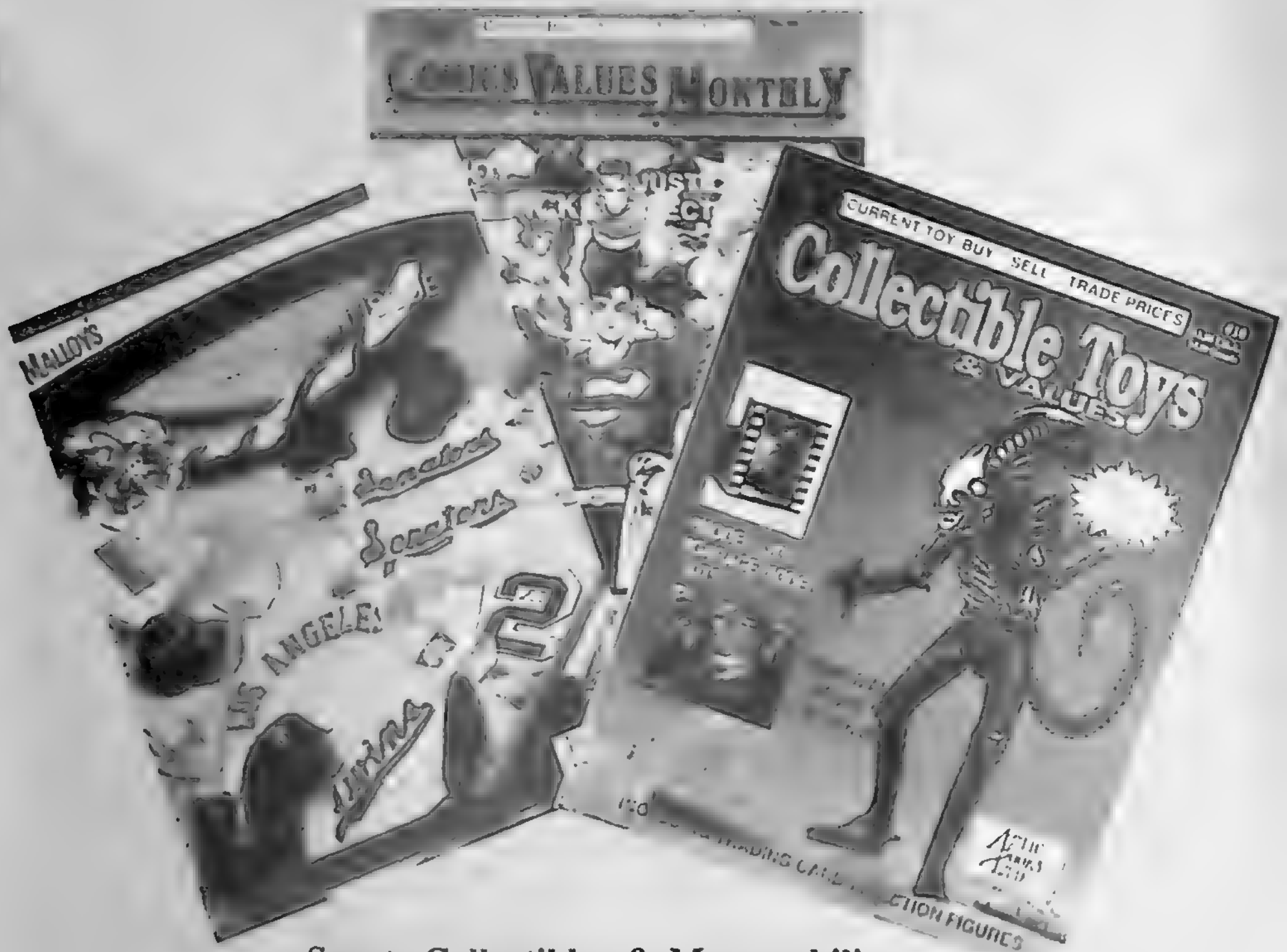

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"ROBOCOP 2, I've seen the movie once."

that.

DAN: *I know a lot of actors, too, and I find them exhilarating. And yet, sometimes I get this . . . headache, you know?* (Laughter.) *When I've been around them too long. It's like, "Ow, I've got to go home."*

FRANK: It's important to keep in mind that the way people describe things tells you a lot about how they perceive them. And, on a film, everyone — the cast, the hairdresser, the grips — when you ask them why they were in, say, Atlanta, they'll say, "I was making this movie." It's never, "I worked on this movie." Never, "I was one of the people working on this," or "I did this function." To everyone, to a certain extent, their part is the entire movie. And that comes out of a certain necessity, because you've got to bring a lot of intensity to your work. But the writer's part — depending on the writer, obviously — is to remind the cast, for instance, that, "I'm sorry. You can't do that. You're dead." *(Laughter.)* I mean, that's just the most extreme example. There's an order to bring to it, to keep in mind dialogue is not conversation, to keep in mind that actors *love* to express extreme emotion. And they're only human, just like us. They love to have a *lot* of things to say. *(Laughter.)* And so, from their perspective, they're doing what they should do. They're putting as much as they can into it. And it's just a matter of balancing all that.

DAN: *This is good segueway to ROBOCOP 2. What did you think of the finished product?*

FRANK: I don't know.

DAN: *You don't know?*

FRANK: I . . . don't know.

DAN: *You don't know?*

FRANK: You talk to me about ROBOCOP 2, and I remember two unforgettable years of my life, very rewarding ones. I've only seen the movie, in its final version, once.

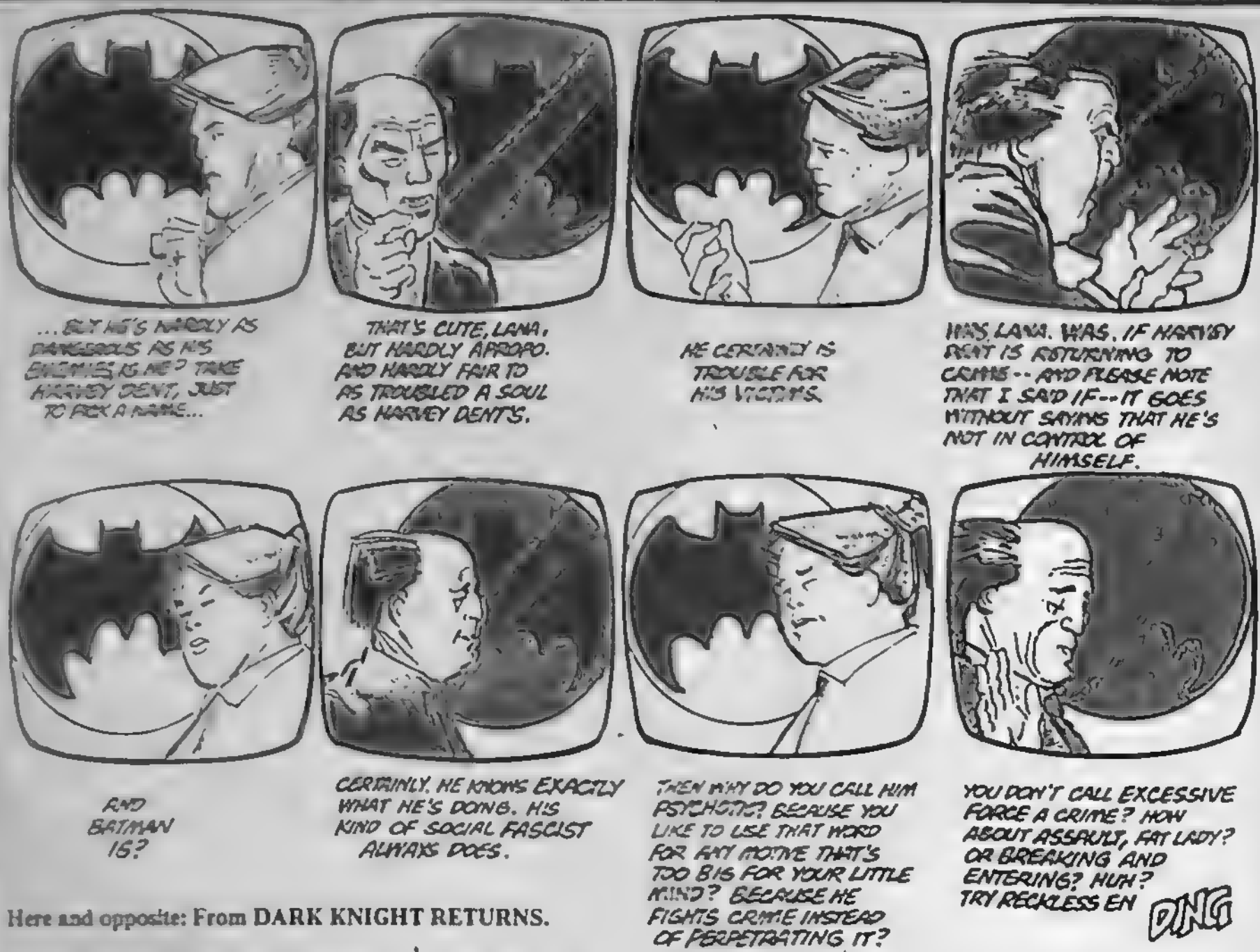
DAN: *I own the videotape, and have seen the movie twice. My friend Paul Beals said to tell you he really likes it. I see your touches in it, and yet . . . I dunno, it grossed me out at the end when he ripped out the thing's brain, or whatever.* (Laughter.)

FRANK: See, what happens to me is that I sit and I watch and I either go, "Hey, yeah! Boy, that line really worked," or, "That was the morning when I had the big argument with **Peter Weller.**" Or, of course, "This would work so much better if they'd had those scenes in the order I wrote them!" Or, "If more of those scenes hadn't been cut . . ."

DAN: *So a liability of doing all this is that you can never look at that movie as if you were someone enjoying it?*

FRANK: I've got to say that when I do a high-production comic book — ELECTRA LIVES AGAIN is the best ex-

"DARK KNIGHT was never a political tract.


...BUT HE'S HARDLY AS DANGEROUS AS HIS ENEMIES, IS HE? TAKE HARVEY DENT, JUST TO PICK A NAME...
THAT'S CUTE, LANA, BUT HARDLY APROPO. AND HARDLY FAIR TO AS TROUBLED A SOUL AS HARVEY DENT'S.
HE CERTAINLY IS TROUBLE FOR HIS VICTIMS.
WAS, LANA. WAS. IF HARVEY DENT IS RETURNING TO CRIME -- AND PLEASE NOTE THAT I SAID IF -- IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT HE'S NOT IN CONTROL OF HIMSELF.
AND BATMAN IS?
CERTAINLY. HE KNOWS EXACTLY WHAT HE'S DOING. HIS KIND OF SOCIAL FASCIST ALWAYS DOES.
THEN WHY DO YOU CALL HIM PSYCHOTIC? BECAUSE YOU LIKE TO USE THAT WORD FOR ANY MOTIVE THAT'S TOO BIG FOR YOUR LITTLE MIND? BECAUSE HE FIGHTS CRIME INSTEAD OF PERPETRATING IT?
YOU DON'T CALL EXCESSIVE FORCE A CRIME? HOW ABOUT ASSAULT, FAT LADY? OR BREAKING AND ENTERING? HUH? TRY RECKLESS EN
DNG

Here and opposite: From **DARK KNIGHT RETURNS.**

ample, because I was more intimately involved in the production of that book than I've ever been involved in anything. It was separated out here. **Lynn Varley** and **Bob Chapman** and I managed the production. Lynn oversaw the separations, and I handled the press check. And, by the time the book came out, I had seen every page so many times that I haven't looked at it all that much since. So that's what a movie can be like.

DAN: *Sure. On ROBOCOP 2, I wanted to just check with you and see if my guesses were correct. The touches that I really liked — where I thought, "There's Frank Miller," "And there's Frank Miller" — included the dismemberment of Robocop . . .*

FRANK: Actually, I've got to give director **Irvin Kershner** a lot of credit for that sequence. I mean, I wrote it, but it wasn't the easiest thing to pull off.

DAN: *The evil kid?*

FRANK: The evil kid was actually, in many ways — here I am giving credit to everyone but me! — very much the creation of **Tim Hunter.** I gave the kid his voice. But one day Tim said he wanted this kid in the story.

DAN: *All right then, this one's you! The reprogramming of Robocop . . .*

FRANK: I had it in my first draft.

DAN: *Exactly! Socially correct messages! I loved that.*

FRANK: That scene around the board room, where they're discussing all the ways he ought to be a role model — that was all mine! I'll take all the credit for that! *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *Excellent. And the subsequent scene in which he basically implodes because of contradictory social messages.*

FRANK: In my original script, there's three pages of direction. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *I'd been waiting for years for somebody to point up the inherent absurdity of all this. And of course, there's a lot of that in DARK KNIGHT, too. I mean, all these damn talking heads sitting around, while Batman acts.*

FRANK: What I found the funniest thing about DARK KNIGHT was that in the real world, all those same talking heads showed up and said the same things about the book as they were saying about Batman in the book.

DAN: *Is that right?*

FRANK: I mean, branding the work "fascist . . ."

DAN: *Did somebody do that?*

FRANK: Oh, many people. I mean, it was a horrible accusation. People should really look that word up and realize what it means.

DAN: *They should also, perhaps, read the book a little more carefully. He's a tough character in a tough world, true, but his compassion comes through. He's not Lobo, you know.*

FRANK: No. But these heroes are open to misinterpretation.

DAN: *It depends on the paradigm that you operate from.*

FRANK: Yes. The easiest way to criticize a book, or any kind of work, is to apply inappropriate standards to it. And if you say, "This isn't good because it's not like TERMS OF ENDEARMENT, well, then anything that isn't virtually identical to that given work is going to fall short. It's true that DARK KNIGHT was not a good political tract. It was never meant to be a political tract.

DAN: *Right. People aren't supposed to use it as a primer on how to act.*

FRANK: Well, I don't want Batman to be telling me how to vote, no. And I don't want to be telling anybody else how to vote. That's not my line of country.

DAN: *But of course, you run into this irony, because the more powerful your work, the more it will have that kind of*

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I don't want Batman telling me how to vote."

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BOB PALIN (writer)
GRASS GREEN (artist)

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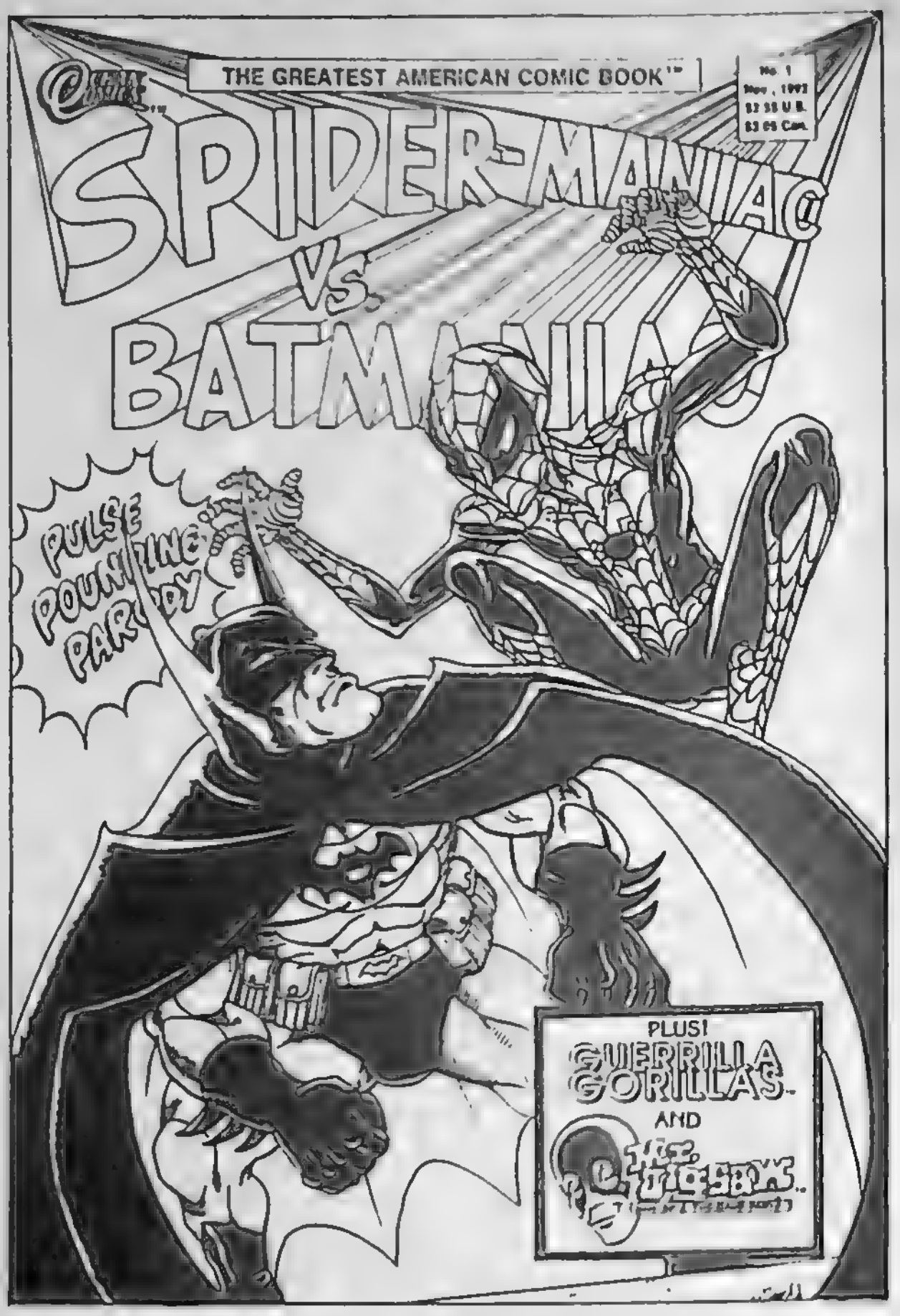

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"In comics the inmates have taken over the asylum."

influence. You can't let that affect your work, I grant you. But there are a lot of people out there looking for answers . . .

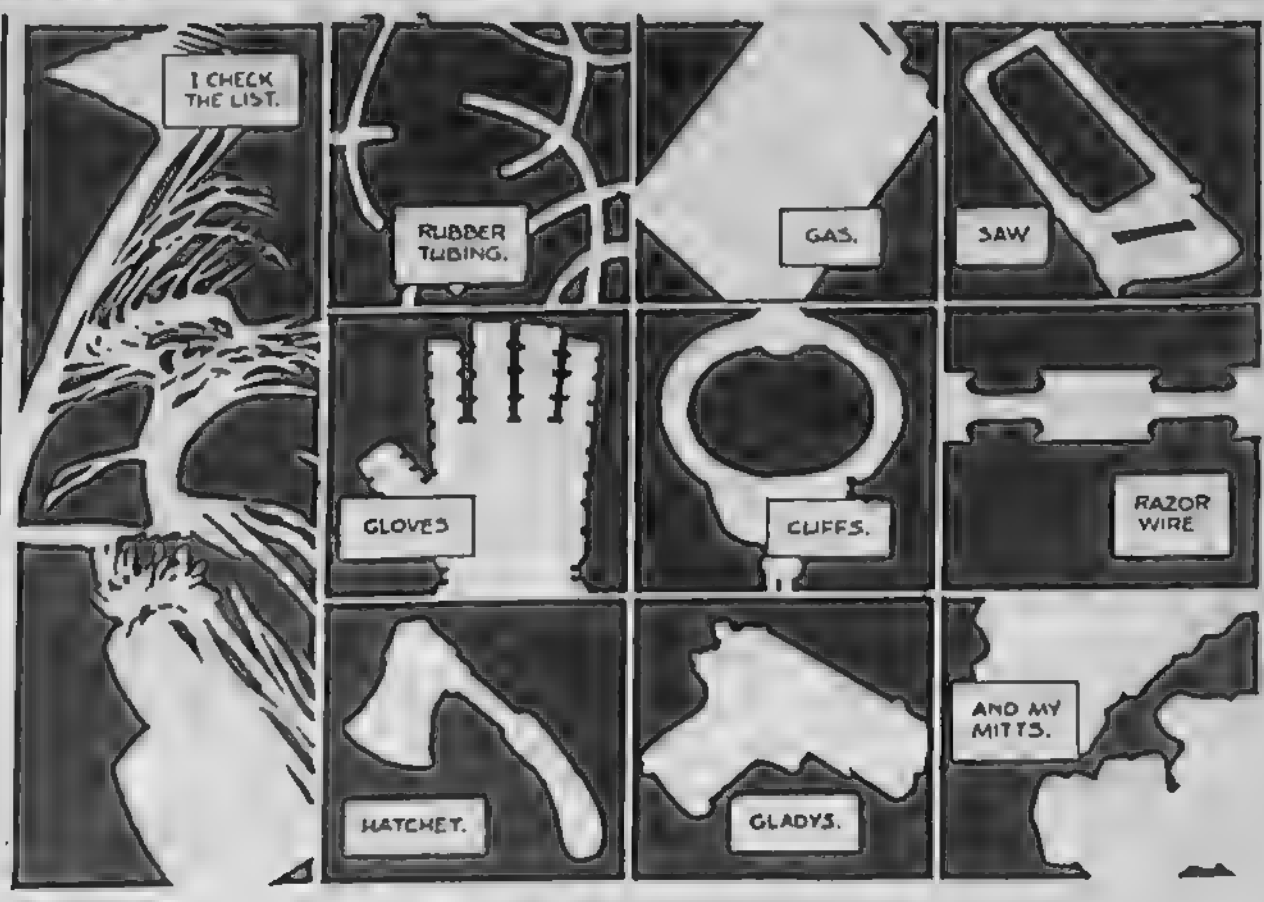
FRANK: Yeah. More and more, I believe that in my given work, in the sort of thing that I do in whatever form, the only place for politics is satire. Since I'm not running for office, since I'm not a political expert — I'm a reasonably informed citizen but, you know, politics are not my life — I believe that what I'm better at is spinnng a good yarn and involving certain things I believe about human emotion and about human decisions. And I'm much more interested in the conflict between two people than between two theories.

DAN: *Even so, even there, for those who might try to use it as a political tract, the satire comes through. There's that fellow who says, "Batman? Yeah, I think he's A-okay . . . Hope he goes after the homos next."* (Laughter.) *It's like, "Don't misapply this, okay?" Another thing I wanted to ask you about is, is it strange for you to turn on the TV and see THE FLASH, go ot the movies and see the BATMAN movie, and say, "Gee, that's me. That's my influence."*

FRANK: Oh, I don't know if I see it entirely that way.

DAN: *Well, you know, the creators say that.*

FRANK: Well. *(Pause.)* I mean, I've seen some of my effect in some of it, but mostly what I think it really is is an interesting set of circumstances arose. I think that Hollywood took a lot of the joy out of what it did by attempting more and more to win a sort of respectability through their work in political terms and in literary terms. And, you know, movies have shown an ambition toward modern literature that left them, in many ways, as shallow and petty as much of what modern literature is. So movies got a lot less interesting to watch. The fact is that people do enjoy adventure stories, and they do enjoy heroes, and while nobody was looking, we were off doing comics — up until recently, not paid much for it — and given tremendous latitude by entertainment standards. And we were a bunch of kids who'd grown up reading comics, and we reveled in all the things that were so unhip about them. You'll find that generally, people like me who come up from the trenches in the monthly pulps, there's a real love of heroes there.



Here and following few pages: SIN CITY.

DAN: *Two things greatly struck me — THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS and WATCHMEN. Looking at those, I thought, "This, at last, is the renaissance of the superhero. Here are people who loved it when they were kids, are adults, and have applied the best of their talents to it."*

FRANK: Really, the strongest dynamic I see in what's happened in comics — and it's happened on a retailer level, on a publisher level and on a distributor level — is that the inmates have taken over the asylum. I mean, a lot of us grew up reading these things, lovin' 'em, and we started doing them, and selling them, and printing them. So now we have a diversity of publishers that's growing. We have a distribution system that, whatever its ups and downs, is certainly simpler and cleaner than what it's replacing. And we've got a generation of cartoonists who, if asked what they do for a living, won't lie.

DAN: *What about those people that you run into who give you the sense that, psychologically, there's something about the very idea of the superhero that they detest?*

FRANK: Um hmm.

DAN: *What is that all about, do you think?*

FRANK: Well, I can't crawl inside their heads.

DAN: *I know. Just a guess?*

FRANK: All I can say is that one of the things that bothers me that's going on in modern literature and entertainment is a "my way is the only way" attitude. It hit comics, very hard, when we started getting media attention. It was time for celebration. We could show the world that we were producing an unexpected variety of material. And there has been some contentiousness, saying, "No, this is not legitimate. *This* is."

DAN: *MAUS. Spiegelman.*

FRANK: And MAUS is a pretty spectacular piece of work . . .

DAN: *It sure is. And I don't see anything about superheroes that precludes its being done.*

FRANK: I think part of it's just the rocky adolescence of comics we're going through right now. We shouldn't be sicced on each other right now.

DAN: *Sure. And beyond that, there's something that . . . (a howl).*

FRANK: Oh, don't mind that sound, by the way. I've got a 18-year-old cat who's a little crazy.

DAN: *I was wondering.*

FRANK: I hear it so often I don't even notice it, and then I realize somebody thinks that I'm torturing babies. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *Well, anything for art, eh? The detesting the superhero thing. There's some psychological component, obviously, for liking superheroes, as well . . .*

FRANK: One thing that I have noticed is that when I am moving, trying to escape certain limitations creatively, that will make me emotionally angry at whatever I'm trying to escape. And that's when I'm likely to say something dumb. And I can only conjecture — I can't speak for other people's feelings — but when you have felt trapped by something . . . you know, for me it was quite a transition to go from

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SIN CITY: "Everybody seems to want to

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doing monthly comics to doing works like RONIN on through SIN CITY. And part of me had to reject everything I'd learned for a while. I found, for instance, that I'd use much more profanity, because I could. And since then, I've had to start adopting my rules as to what I think is a good idea.

DAN: *Yeah. When you've got a new color on your palette, I guess you want to use it.*

FRANK: The same thing happened to French comics, about a decade or so before, when all of a sudden **Moebius** and the rest sprang on the scene. There was all kinds of material that was unspeakable in many ways. It was just a stage, and a very healthy one.

DAN: *Let me just whip along here. How about an ELEKTRA: ASSASSIN movie? There was some talk of that.*

FRANK: I'm working on the script. I can't really talk beyond that, because I don't want to curse it.

DAN: *That's fine, just to give people the encouragement that it's out there.*

FRANK: But always remember, the road between script and theater is very long, and fraught with peril . . . *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *Speaking of Elektra, what did you think of Rex Smith as Daredevil on TV?*

FRANK: **Rex Smith** as Daredevil. Was he in the HULK show?

DAN: *Yeah, the HULK show.*

FRANK: I enjoyed that.

DAN: *So did I. I would have preferred the real costume, or something closer to it, though.*

FRANK: Costumes are a tough transition, I think. If I have my way with ELEKTRA, there won't be a costume.

DAN: *What about THE FLASH? Paul DeMeo and Danny Bilson cite you as an influence on that.*

FRANK: I saw a few episodes, and enjoyed them quite a bit. I thought they threw away a lot of bad habits that have traditionally come with a superhero . . .

DAN: *On TV, you mean?*

FRANK: Or in film. There was no chuckling at the thing, but there was some good, genuine, from-the-material humor.

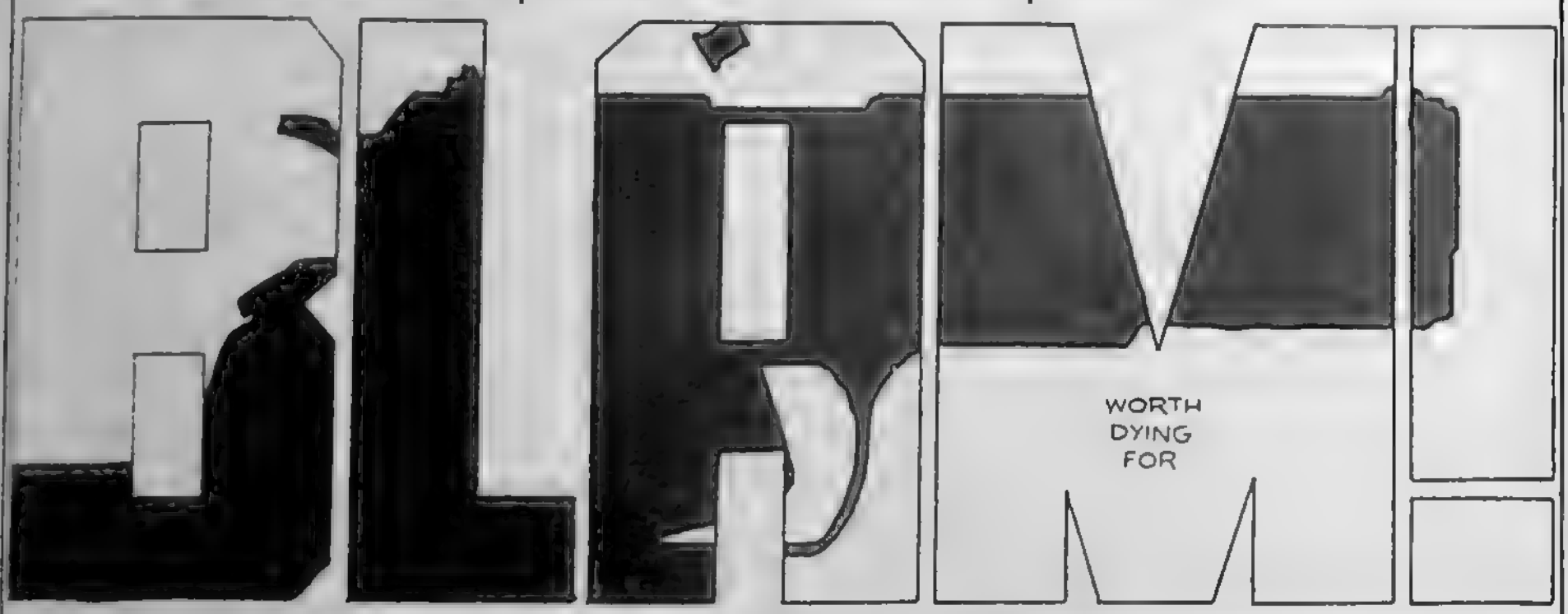
DAN: *The thing Rand talks about. You laugh with the hero, and not at him?*

FRANK: Yeah. There was one scene that I just absolutely loved — when his girlfriend was on her way over, and he cleaned up his apartment in two seconds, but kicked up such a wind that he messed it all up again. I thought they did a lot of good things in the show.

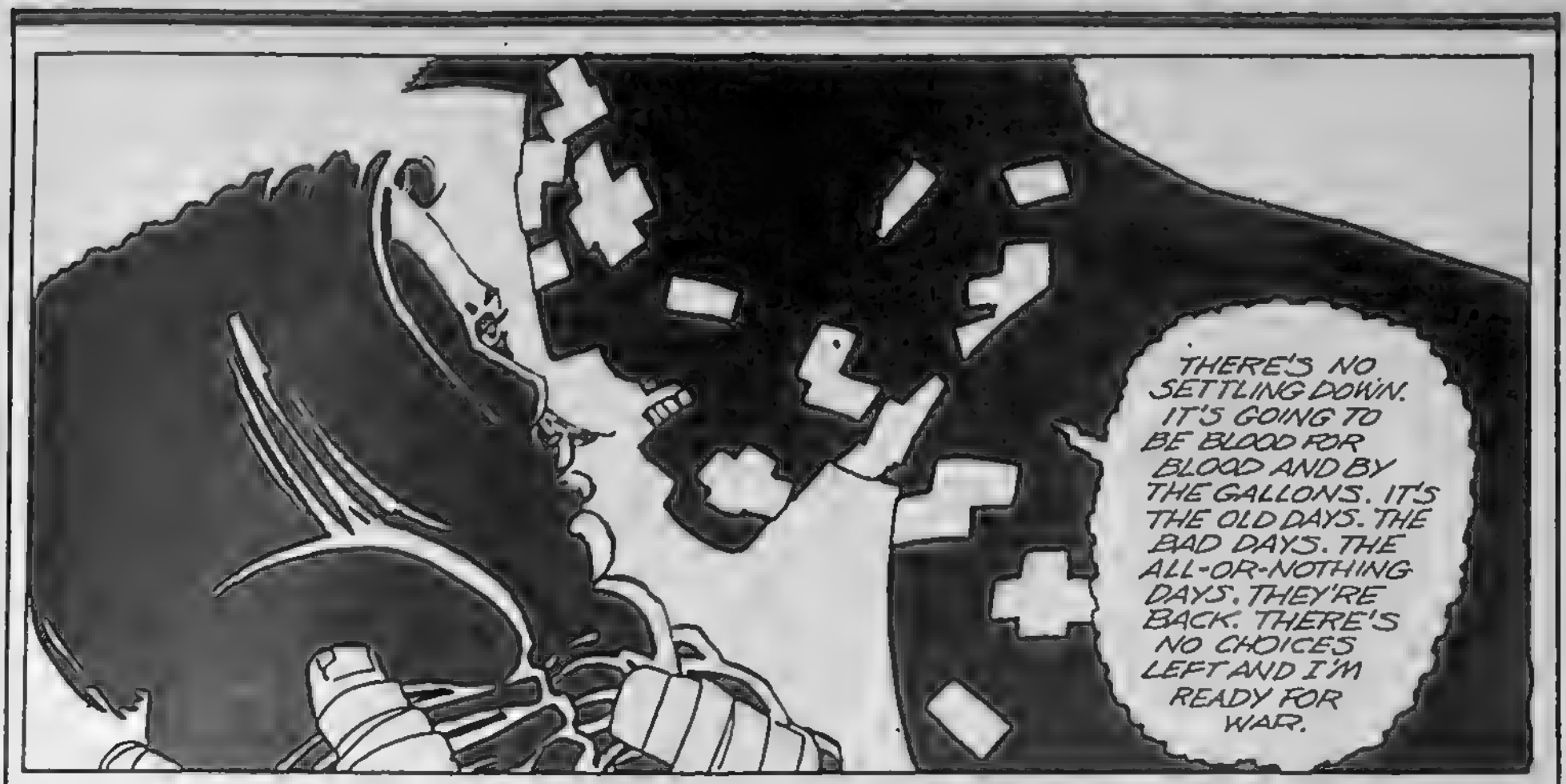
DAN: *Yeah. When you look at the BATMAN movie, do you ever think, "There's something from me . . ."?*

FRANK: No, I only saw it once.

DAN: *The bitchiness of Alfred, I thought, is THE DARK KNIGHT*



create a new universe. I just want a town."


THERE'S NO SETTLING DOWN. IT'S GOING TO BE BLOOD FOR BLOOD AND BY THE GALLONS. IT'S THE OLD DAYS. THE BAD DAYS. THE ALL-OR-NOTHING DAYS. THEY'RE BACK. THERE'S NO CHOICES LEFT AND I'M READY FOR WAR.

SIN CITY TM & ©1991/92 Frank Miller.

RETURNS.

FRANK: Well, I had a ball with Alfred, and it was just because he was a character nobody'd ever done anything with. I think it was **John Gielgud** in ARTHUR who got me thinking, "This is Alfred." He's living with a larger-than-life force, and he only sees it through the eyes of a crabby old guy. *(Laughter.)* But as far as the BATMAN movie, I've learned that whenever I've gotten that intimately involved with something, I shouldn't see what anybody else does with it, because I'm going to hate it. I don't see it clearly. It's not what I'd do, so it's not good. I've got to just accept that as my perspective.

DAN: *I could see your touches. Just little things. The focus on the pearls during the murder of his parents.*

FRANK: And they got to use real pearls.

DAN: *And the in-joke about Corto Maltese, you know. Where did that come from?*

FRANK: The one thing I can comment on is that I really liked **Michael Keaton** as Bruce Wayne. I mean, it was a tough job for that guy. He doesn't look the part. He's the wrong size for the part, and everything. But he managed to convince me that he had this other life — and this undying passion. So I liked that quite a bit.

DAN: *And it didn't bother you, the characterization of the absent-minded Bruce Wayne?*

FRANK: Well, for some reason I found that easier to accept than the other things. I guess it's because, for me, Bruce Wayne was always just an empty shell.

DAN: *This does inhabit him. Somehow it makes sense that he only can function as Batman.*

FRANK: The whole opening of DARK KNIGHT was just this man who was decaying from inside, because he wasn't being the only thing he could be. I never saw Batman, for instance, as a philanthropist. I saw him as someone who learned how to make enough money and develop the right technology to carry on his war, and who really didn't see beyond that.

DAN: *Right. A crusader first and foremost. What about a SPIDER-MAN/BATMAN crossover, then? Is that in the works somewhere?*

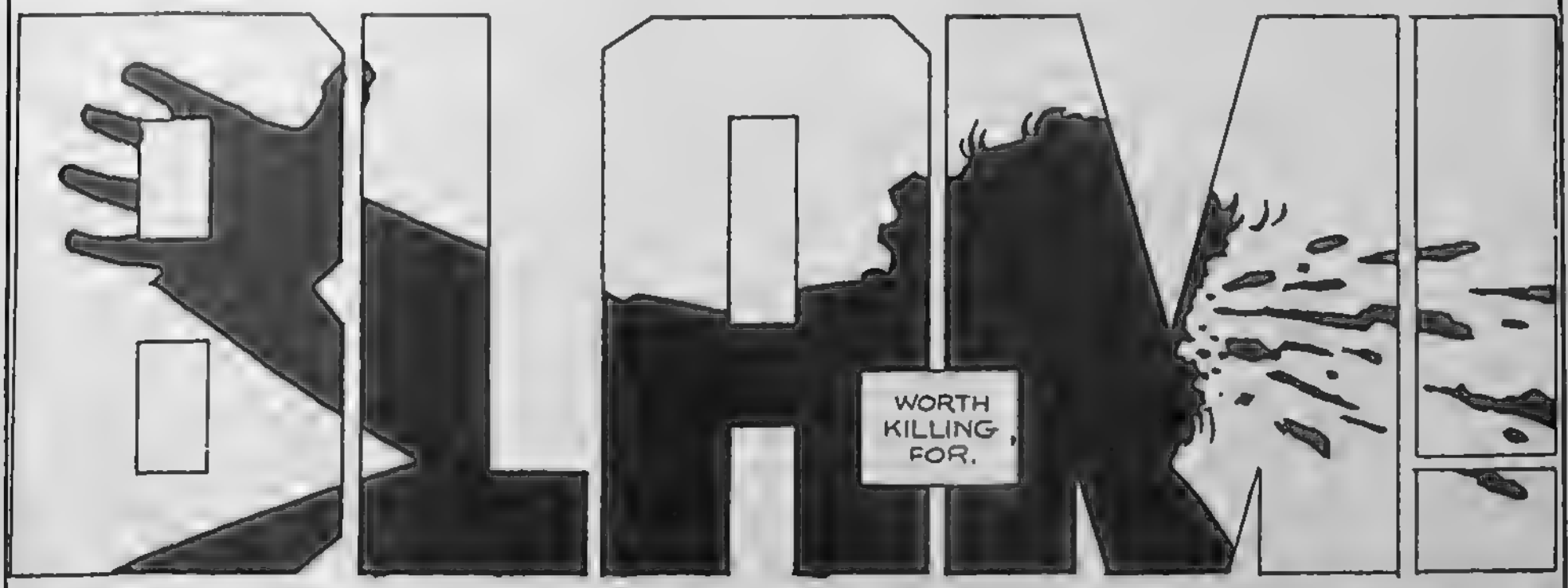
FRANK: No. that was discussed years ago, and one company or the other killed the notion.

DAN: *That's one of those great works that we won't see, I suppose?*

FRANK: Well, at least that one got killed before it got off the ground.

DAN: *What else do you want to touch on?*

FRANK: Let's see. Oh, getting back to SIN CITY for a moment; like I said, the serialization is complete now. The last episode is 48 pages long. We're hoping,



"From DARK KNIGHT people have culled

sometime around Christmas, to have the collection out. The only thing that would delay that is me, because I'm doing a number of new pages for it

DAN: *Expanding it along what line, then?*

FRANK: Mainly in terms of transition, and in terms of little moments that I wanted to have in there but couldn't put in it. And also a number of cityscapes. You get more of a sense of where the city is. Bits and pieces throughout, and all geared to remove the episode breaks and to turn it into one seamless, 200-page book

DAN: *One other thing I wanted to ask you, too, was what you think of the sociopath hero thing. Have we run through that now, or is that going deeper?*

FRANK: *(Laughter.)* Well, you know, it's hard for me to comment on it. Everybody blames me for it.

DAN: *Not me. Just wanted to know what you thought of it.*

FRANK: Well, I think there's been a certain amount of misrepresentation of what WATCHMEN and DARK KNIGHT really were. Now, WATCHMEN and DARK KNIGHT are profoundly different pieces of work. It's mainly because of timing and enthusiasm that they're lumped together. You know, Alan and I are friends, but we see the world through very, very different eyes.

DAN: *There's another similarity, too, though, which is that both works make you see what the impact of these figures might be on the world.*

FRANK: Yeah, but one view is . . . I can't really put a word on Alan's view.

DAN: *Well, it's European.*

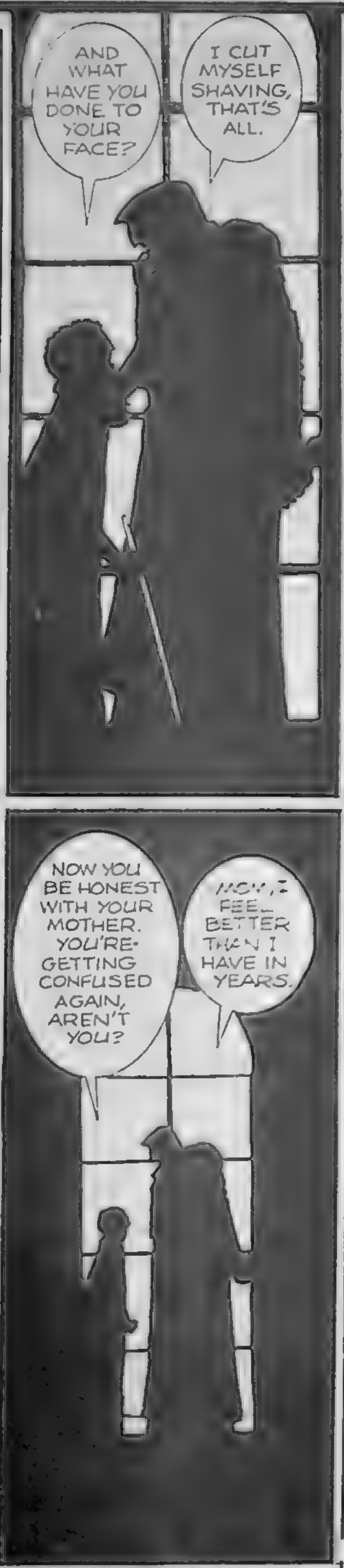
FRANK: It's analytical, and mine is very romantic. And those are two very opposed points of view sometimes. Alan and I have joked that I threw the brass band funeral and he did the autopsy. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *That's a great line.*

FRANK: But as far as what's been going on now, I haven't read enough of what's coming out in the regular superhero comics to really make any hard-and-fast statement. I do have a sense of deterioration — that from DARK KNIGHT people have culled some of the harshness, but none of the romance.

DAN: *A friend of mine says, "These people who try to be Frank Miller. They need Frank Miller to come back and say, 'Here's how you do it. I'll show you again.'"*

FRANK: Honestly, my next superhero job is going to be about as different from


AND WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO YOUR FACE?
I CUT MYSELF SHAVING, THAT'S ALL.
NOW YOU BE HONEST WITH YOUR MOTHER. YOU'RE GETTING CONFUSED AGAIN, AREN'T YOU?
NOW, I FEEL BETTER THAN I HAVE IN YEARS.

DARK KNIGHT as possible. I'm working on a series with **Geoff Darrow**, but that's in the future. He's far from being able to work on it right now. He's doing other things.

DAN: *What other projects can you tell us about?*

FRANK: Let me just go down the list of upcoming, I guess. My new project with **Geoff Darrow** is named THE BIG GUY. Later this year, I'm going to script the next book in the LIBERTY series. **Dave Gibbons** is all up for that, so I'm looking forward to that quite a bit.

Other than that, more SIN CITYs. I'm going to be getting to work on the next book of SIN CITY,because I conceived this, and intend to continue with it, as an ongoing series of books. I've created an awful lot of characters and places in SIN CITY that never appear in the first book. You know, these days everybody seems to want to create a new universe. I just want a town. *(Laughter.)* But as far as the superhero stuff, I think that what's really been lost in more recent times is the real magic of them — and some of the silliness of them.

DAN: *Well, you've said this before in interviews, but with a superhero group or, in effect, a world of superheroes, where everybody wears a costume, flies around, has a power ring or something, you lose all sense of that awe, of that mystery, of that, "Look! Up in the sky!"*

FRANK: Yeah. Basically, I think, it's very strange. It's almost like Hollywood has relearned a certain amount of the sense of heroism from comics and, in a way, comics have been learning a sense of diminishing the hero from Hollywood. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *Exactly. There's a trade-off here.*

FRANK: It's like your hero can have problems, but, geez, making him a drunk driver, that kind of makes me sick of him.

DAN: *And I have a tendency not to trust a drunk driver with a power ring or Iron Man's armor, you know?*

FRANK: Yeah. Especially if he's not smart enough to fly home. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *No matter what they say, Hal Jordan was never a drunk driver! And never will be! And that's just that!* (Laughter.)

FRANK: Well, also, now that I've got much more freedom thatn I used to, certainly the hero in SIN CITY is no bucket of health. On the other hand, it's not a childhood icon of mine. He's a character that was created out of whole cloth, and had entire stories built around that character. That's bit different than taking something that other people have worked on.

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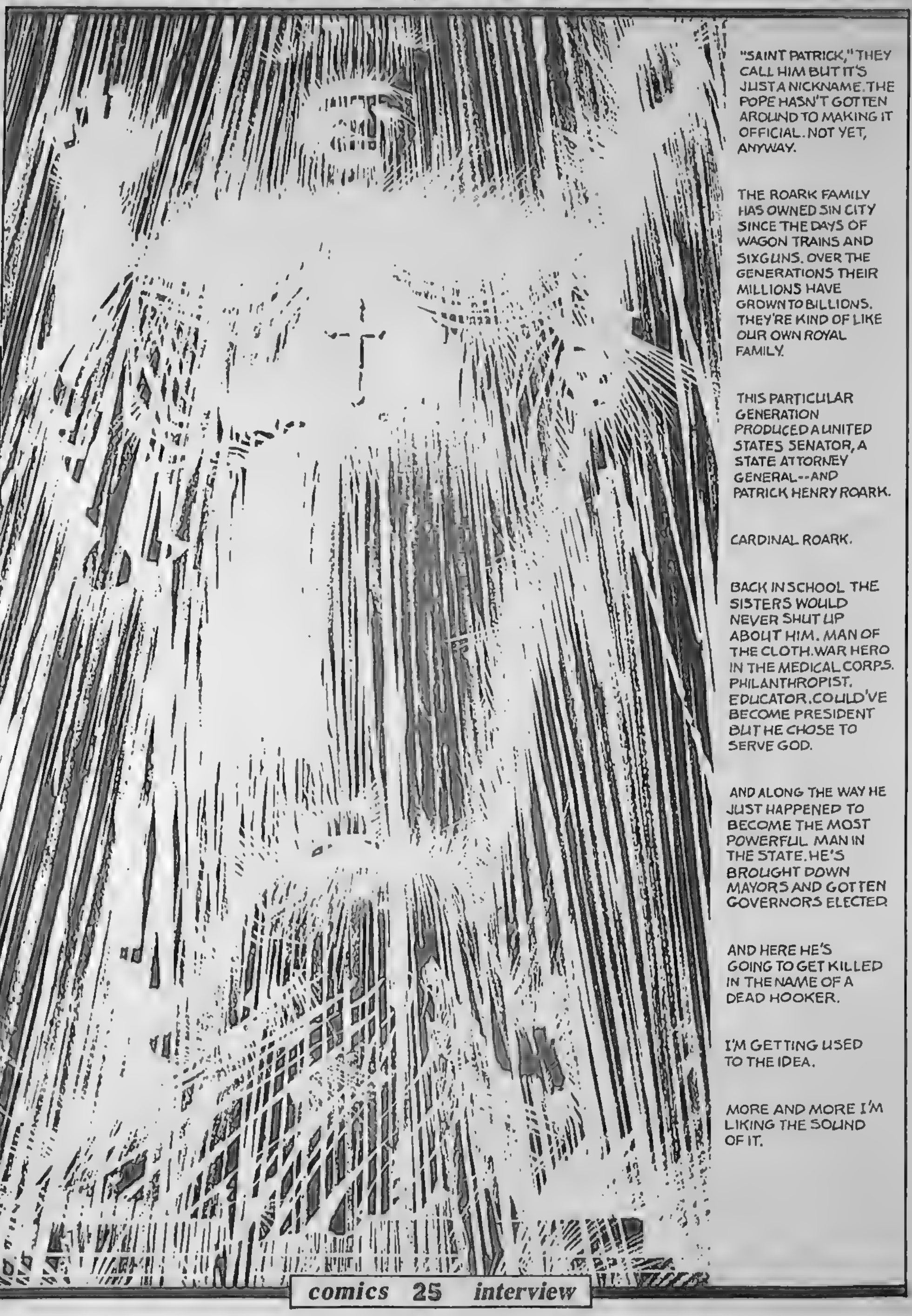
some of the harshness, but none of the romance."


"SAINT PATRICK," THEY CALL HIM BUT IT'S JUST A NICKNAME. THE POPE HASN'T GOTTEN AROUND TO MAKING IT OFFICIAL. NOT YET, ANYWAY.
THE ROARK FAMILY HAS OWNED SIN CITY SINCE THE DAYS OF WAGON TRAINS AND SIXGUNS. OVER THE GENERATIONS THEIR MILLIONS HAVE GROWN TO BILLIONS. THEY'RE KIND OF LIKE OUR OWN ROYAL FAMILY.
THIS PARTICULAR GENERATION PRODUCED A UNITED STATES SENATOR, A STATE ATTORNEY GENERAL--AND PATRICK HENRY ROARK.
CARDINAL ROARK.
BACK IN SCHOOL THE SISTERS WOULD NEVER SHUT UP ABOUT HIM. MAN OF THE CLOTH. WAR HERO IN THE MEDICAL CORPS. PHILANTHROPIST. EDUCATOR. COULD'VE BECOME PRESIDENT BUT HE CHOSE TO SERVE GOD.
AND ALONG THE WAY HE JUST HAPPENED TO BECOME THE MOST POWERFUL MAN IN THE STATE. HE'S BROUGHT DOWN MAYORS AND GOTTEN GOVERNORS ELECTED
AND HERE HE'S GOING TO GET KILLED IN THE NAME OF A DEAD HOOKER.
I'M GETTING USED TO THE IDEA.
MORE AND MORE I'M LIKING THE SOUND OF IT.

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"I've got nothing against nostalgia now and then."

DAN: *Right. I don't think DARK KNIGHT violates the spirit of the earlier stuff.*

FRANK: And most of the inspiration for it comes from the very earliest **Bill Finger/Jerry Robinson** stuff.

DAN: *Which is some of the stuff I like best, too. And in SUPERMAN as well. Even though they're very crude stories, there's a force in them. He was something of a flying — or rather leaping — socialist in those days, let's face it.*

FRANK: Oh, yeah! Even more importantly, he was a golem. Always the common man. I remember that remarkable one where the soldiers were being killed in the war, and Superman flew across the battlefield and got the generals and put them on the front line.

DAN: *Or any of the times when, "Oh, you're a corrupt mine owner who lets his miners die. How would you like to go* down there!" *People always forget that with the sanitized later character, although he has his moments, too. I like Chris Reeve's portrayal. I like the flying Boy Scout.*

FRANK: It's got some real virtues. It's got a big, old load of nostalgia, but I've got nothing in particular against nostalgia every now and then. As long as it doesn't laugh at itself. One thing you can say for **Chris Reeve** as an actor is that he played that character straight.

DAN: *Exactly. I recently interviewed Lyle Talbot, who played Luthor in a SUPERMAN serial and Commissioner Gordon in a BATMAN serial. I asked him about that, and he said, "No, no. We would never have treated it as camp. The thing was not to kid it." For whatever the virtues of those cheap serials . . .*

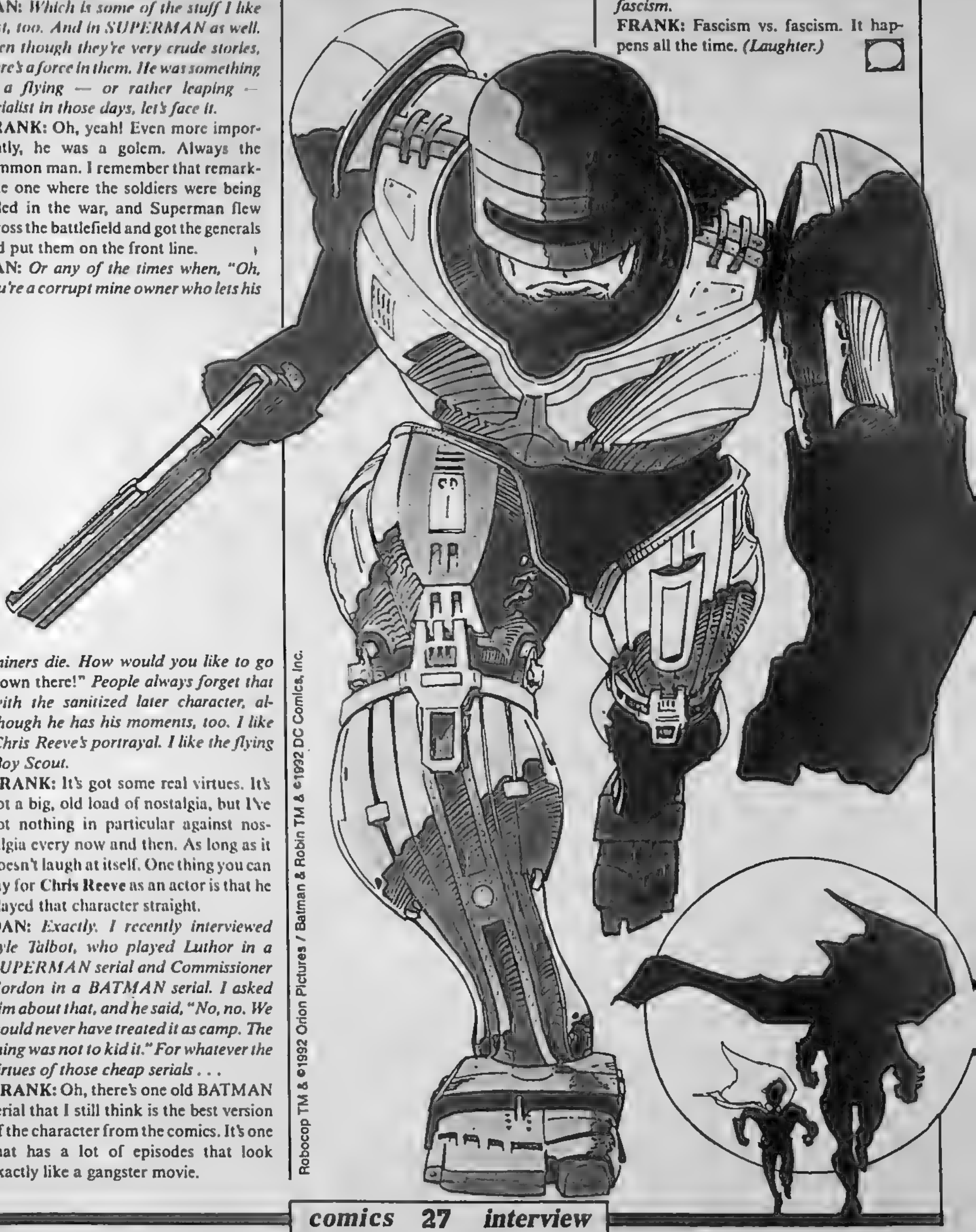
FRANK: Oh, there's one old BATMAN serial that I still think is the best version of the character from the comics. It's one that has a lot of episodes that look exactly like a gangster movie.

DAN: *It's interesting to view the first one now. They've re-released it, but they've put in a new voice-over. The original said, "This was part of a foreign land, transplanted bodily to America and known as Little Tokyo. Since a wise government rounded up the shifty-eyed Japs, it has become virtually a ghost street . . ."*

FRANK: Ho, Nellie! That'll get you yelled at. *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *Now there's fascism! Anti-fascist fascism.*

FRANK: Fascism vs. fascism. It happens all the time. *(Laughter.)*



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THE CHRONIC RIFT

a talk show on fantasy, science fiction, comics, and related media that airs every week on Manhattan Cable and Paragon (Fridays, 4:30pm, Channel 17) and is also available on VHS videotape

First season

ANY THREE OF THE EPISODES LISTED BELOW ARE ON SALE ON ONE CUSTOM-MADE VHS TAPE FOR $15

#1: Fantasy & Science Fiction on the Screen
[Comic in review: *Graphic Story Monthly*]
#2: Quantum Leap
[Comic in review: *Classics Illustrated*]
#3: Cover Art on Books and Graphic Novels
[Comic in review: *Cerebus*]
#4: Science Fiction TV Shows that Flopped
[Comic in review: *Big Numbers*]
#5: J.R.R. Tolkien
[Comic in review: Eclipse's adaptation of *The Hobbit*]
#6: Women in Fantasy & Science Fiction
Featuring author SUSAN SHWARTZ. [Comic in review: *Comic Book Collector* videotape]
#7: Star Trek: the Next Generation
Featuring DC Comics' *Trek* editor ROBERT GREENBERGER and Pocket Books' *Trek* novel editor DAVID STERN. [Comic in review: *Fever in Urbiond*] Note: poor picture quality
#8: Frankenstein: the First SF Novel?
Featuring Mary Shelley biographer EMILY W. SUNSTEIN. [Comic in review: *Kings in Disguise*] Note: poor picture quality
#9: Robert A. Heinlein
Featuring editor KATHRYN CRAMER. [Comic in review: *New Warriors*] Note: poor picture quality
#10: Role-Playing Games
Featuring Dungeons & Dragons guru GARY GYGAX and game designer GREG COSTIKYAN. [Comic in review: *Warts and All*]
#11: Special Effects
Featuring special effects wizards PETER WALLACH and KEN WALKER (*Star Trek V: the Final Frontier*). [Comics in review: *Star Trek* and *Star Trek: the Next Generation*]
#12: What is Horror?
Featuring former *Fangoria* editor/screenwriter ROBERT MARTIN. [Comic in review: *Nation of Snitches*]
#13: Alternative Comic Books
Featuring *Publishers Weekly* comics reviewer CALVIN REID. [Comic in review: *M*]
#14: Peter David
Comics/sf writer PETER DAVID himself comes on to discuss his work. [Comic in review: *Dirty Plotte*]
#15: Comic Specialty Shops
Featuring three comic store managers from all over the NYC area. [Comic in review: *President Bill: a Graphic Epic*]
#16: Doctor Who
Featuring New Jersey Network producer ERIC LUSKIN, renowned *Who* expert PATRICK DANIEL O'NEILL, and comics writer/*Who* fan JO DUFFY. [Comic in review: *Denizens of Deep City*]
#17: Play-by-Mail Games
Featuring RICHARD LOOMIS, the creator of PBMs. [Comic in review: *The Flash* TV series]
#18: Creation Convention Coverage
Featuring coverage of the Thanksgiving Creation Convention at the Penta Hotel in New York City, including talks, auctions, interviews, etc. Note: poor picture and sound quality
#19: 1990 Holiday Party
The Chronic Rift's first solstice party, with 15 guests, most of whom appeared on past Roundtables. [Comic in review: *Wolff & Byrd: Counselors of the Macabre*]
#20: Fantasy & Science Fiction in the Classroom
Featuring author BRUCE COVILLE.
#21: 1990 Roundtable Awards Ceremony
See the winners in 11 categories in the f&sf & comic fields as voted on by our viewers, plus the induction of WILLIAM GIBSON into our Hall of Fame. Lots of guests, including JO DUFFY, KEN WALKER, and JACK WOMACK.
#22: Science Fact in Science Fiction
Featuring "hard science" authors BEN BOVA and CHARLES PLATT. [Comic in review: *Bad Weather*]
#23: Beauty & the Beast
Featuring *B&TB* graphic novel author WENDY PINI. [Comic in review: *Frank Frazetta's Johnny Comet*] Note: poor sound quality
#24: Ursula K. Le Guin
Featuring author P.M. GRIFFIN. [Comic in review: *Megaton Man*]
#25: Japanese Animation
Featuring Mastrel Press editor ROBERT FENELON, and *Akira* translator JO DUFFY. [Comic in review: *The 6 Voyages of Lone Sloane*]
#26: Getting Your F&SF Published
Featuring *Omni* fiction editor ELLEN DATLOW and agent LORI PERKINS. [Comic in review: *Drawn & Quarterly*]

#27: 1991 Interview Special
Featuring interviews with author THOMAS M. DISCH, artist DANIEL HORNE, and editor ANDREW HELFER.
#28: Blake's 7

Second season

#29: Cyberpunk
Featuring author WALTER JON WILLIAMS and Warner Books editor BRIAN THOMSEN.
#30: Star Trek
Featuring *Trek* author MARGARET WANDER BONANNO.
#31: Attack of the "B"-movies
Featuring author CRAIG SHAW GARDNER. [Comic in review: *Cages*]
#32: Anne McCaffrey
Featuring authors P.M. GRIFFIN and JODY LYNN NYE and Ace/Berkley editor SUSAN ALLISON. [Comic in review: *Heartthrobs*]
#33: Time Paradoxes
Featuring author TIM POWERS and *Analog/Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine* editor IAN RANDAL STROCK. [Comic in review: *Deadface: Doing the Islands with Bacchus*]
#34: The Society for Creative Anachronism
Featuring three members of the SCA. [Comics in review: *Lost In Space* and *Quantum Leap*]
#35: Heroes & Villains
Featuring authors CHRIS CLAREMONT and ELLEN KUSHNER. [Comic in review: *Curse of the Molemen featuring Big Baby*]
#36: Vampires
Featuring editors ELLEN DATLOW and JOHN BETANCOURT, and vampire historian GREG COX. [Comic in review: *Billi 99*] Note: poor sound quality
#37: War in Fantasy & Science Fiction
Featuring military sf authors DAVID DRAKE and S.N. LEWITT, and Baen Books publisher JIM BAEN. [Comic in review: *Maus, a Survivor's Tale II: and Here My Troubles Began*]
#38: Isaac Asimov
Featuring editors MARTIN H. GREENBERG and DAVID G. HARTWELL. [Comic in review: *Cheap Novelties: the Pleasures of Urban Decay*]
#39: Spider-Man
Featuring former Spider-editor JIM SALICRUP. [Comic in review: *Captain Confederacy*]
#40: 1991 Holiday Party
Once again *The Chronic Rift* celebrates the solstice, this time featuring interviews with authors MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY and CHRIS CLAREMONT, and a *TCR* retrospective.

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#41: Fantasy, Science Fiction, & Organized Religion
Featuring authors THOMAS M. DISCH and JAMES MORROW. [Comic in review: *20 Nude Dancers 20 Year Two*]
#42: Jules Verne & H.G. Wells
Featuring Verne biographer ROBERT QUACKENBUSH and Wells biographer BRIAN MURRAY; *plus* interview with artist/author ARLEN SCHUMER.
#43: Story Weaving
Featuring authors TERRY BISSON and ESTHER FRIESNER, and editor/author GREG COX creating a short story extemporaneously with the hosts. [Comic in review: *Martyrman and His Roommate Phi*]
#44: The Prisoner
Featuring author/critic JOHN PEEL and cartoonist DEAN MOTTER. [Comic in review: *Flies on the Ceiling: the Complete Love & Rockets Vol. 9*]
#45: Orson Scott Card
Featuring editor/author KIJ JOHNSON and editor/packager JAMES FRENKEL. [Comic in review: *Cerebus: Mothers & Daughters*]
#46: The Fantasy of Shakespeare
Featuring comics writer/publisher JO DUFFY; *plus* interview with sf author MARGARET WANDER BONANNO.
#47: The 1991 Roundtable Awards
See the winners in 17 categories in the f&sf & comic fields as voted on by our viewers, plus the induction of GENE RODDENBERRY into our Hall of Fame. Lots of guests, including LISA AUFENANGER, CHRIS CLAREMONT, JO DUFFY, and AMY STOUT.
#48: The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy
Featuring "Hour of the Wolf" host JIM FREUND; *plus* interview with cartoonist WILLIAM MESSNER-LOEBS *and* GARY GYGAX presents his new role-playing game.
#49: The TV Shows of Kenneth Johnson (Alien Nation, The Bionic Woman, The Incredible Hulk, V)
Featuring TV producer KENNETH JOHNSON himself; *plus* the First Annual CACUPs are presented.
#50: European Comic Books
Featuring Catalan publisher BERND METZ and NBM publisher TERRY NANTIER.
#51: Highlights of I-Con XI Part 1
Interviews with authors ROBERT SHECKLEY and WALTER JON WILLIAMS and actress SARAH DOUGLAS.
#52: Highlights of I-Con XI Part 2
A panel on Censorship in Writing with comics writer/publisher JO DUFFY, f&sf author NANCY KRESS, and editor/packager JAMES FRENKEL.
#53: Lost in Space
Featuring author JOEL EISNER.
#54: 1992 Interview Special
Featuring interviews with author JANET KAGAN and cartoonist DAVID CHELSEA. [Comic in review: *Li'l Abner*]

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--Erik Davis
The Village Voice

Branden's PSYCHOLOGY OF SELF-ESTEEM

and subsequent books have been influential.

NATHANIEL BRANDEN

Interviewing a prominent author who's a psychologist is a little like trying to throw a surprise party for Sherlock Holmes. Reporters like to frame questions which may reveal the underlying psychological and philosophical premises of their subjects — to probe "what makes them tick," in the journalistic parlance. But the expert psychologist's hearing is more attuned to the ticking than your own, and any stratagem you devise may well ring out like a clock tower to his trained ears. Your questions may, in fact, be more revealing to him than his answers are to you.

Nevertheless, I cheerfully leaped at the chance for a conversation with Nathaniel Branden, one of the most prominent psychologists in the United States as well as, arguably, a central figure in American literary and philosophical history. For while the Beverly Hills psychologist has become famous for several books probing the nature and the necessity of self-esteem, he is equally well-known as a chief associate of the American philosopher/novelist Ayn Rand, who died a decade ago.

The Russian-born Rand, setting herself the goal of portraying an ideal man in literature, created the haunting characters of Howard Roark in THE FOUNTAINHEAD (1943) and John Galt in ATLAS SHRUGGED (1957) — the latter novel second only to the Bible in a recent survey of the most influential books for American readers. Riding a roller-coaster parabola of ecstasy and tragedy, the much-younger Branden became Rand's greatest protege, her intellectual heir, her lover and — because of the latter — finally, in Rand's bitter estimation, her greatest enemy. That story is recounted in a book by Branden's former wife, Barbara, called THE PASSION OF AYN RAND (Doubleday, 1986) and Branden's own JUDGMENT DAY: MY YEARS WITH AYN RAND (Houghton Mifflin, 1989).

Before Branden's THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SELF-ESTEEM was published in 1969, scant attention had been paid to the concept in psychological circles. That book, and Branden's eight subsequent books on psychology, have been so influential that self-esteem is now routinely regarded as central to clinical psychology. In fact, far from being ignored, the concept is now in danger of being trivialized by its very popularity. But Branden's painstaking work in the area has enabled him to break the concept down into specific, rational components which, while too detailed to be explored here, may be summed up in Branden's own pithy phrase. Self-esteem, he explains, is really "the reputation we get with ourselves."

And what, you may ask, has all this to do with comic books? A good deal more than you might imagine, as it turns out. For it was Branden's childhood fascination with superheroes which led him to take his first steps along the path to Rand's philosophy of life. And now, as an acknowledged expert on the theme of self-esteem, he is able to offer a unique insight on the real value of these eminently unreal characters. But first, a word from Ayn Rand . . .

"Once Ayn and I were talking about our childhood heroes and ideals and the roles they played in our development, and I told her, 'When I was six or seven, my hero was the Lone Ranger. Then, at about eight or nine, it was Superman. When I was twelve, I discovered the novels of Baroness Orczy, and my ideal became the Scarlet Pimpernel.' As an aside I remarked, 'Interesting, isn't it, that all three were in a sense invisible? Their true identities were not known to people.' I went on, 'So how do I translate what I admire in these figures into the terms of twentieth-century reality? That

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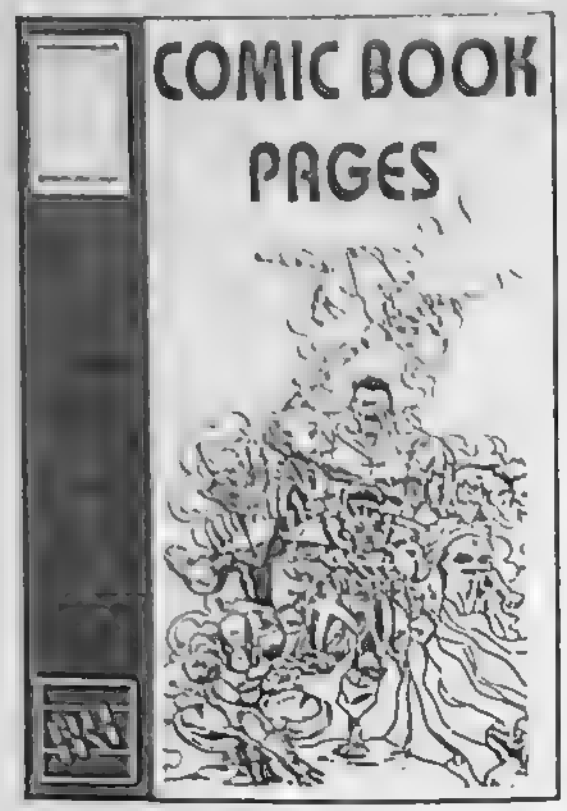

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question felt supremely important. I had no interest in rescuing French aristocrats from the guillotine, but there was something in those adventure stories I was in love with and didn't want to let go of. I wondered how I could apply it to my life in the modern world. Then at fourteen I read THE FOUNTAINHEAD — and discovered the answer: The adventure of creative work. Individualism as a moral battle.'

"Ayn became enthusiastic. 'Don't you see?' she exclaimed. 'You kept the same values — daring, audacity, independence — but you kept adjusting the form of their expression to your growth and developing knowledge. You stayed integrated. A more conventional man would have left it all as a daydream that had nothing to do with his adult life. And observe that you weren't literal-minded: you didn't decide to become an architect like Roark. You responded to the abstraction *— passion for one's work — and translated that into terms relevant to your own goals.' She added, 'Of course you're right: it is significant that all three childhood heroes were masked or disguised — invisible men. That would strike a chord in your own feelings of isolation.'*

"Gratefully and cheerfully I answered, 'I'm not feeling invisible now.'"

Nathaniel Branden, JUDGMENT DAY.

THE FOUNTAINHEAD

THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS

DAN HAGEN: *One thing I noticed, on the answering machine message you left, is that you tend to use language very precisely. Is that psychological training, Rand's influence or something you've always done, do you think?*

NATHANIEL BRANDEN: It's something I have always done. It really comes out of a deep need, for me, to be clear. In other words, I have a personal need to be as clear as I possibly can be, and it shows up in my speech patterns and my ways of communicating. One of the compliments that I especially like is when people tell me that my writing is unusually clear, because that, for me, is my highest value as a writer — ahead of everything else, to be clear.

DAN: *The Frank Miller story. How did you happen to run across THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS?*

NATHANIEL: I was in London around the time that the first BATMAN film was soon going to be released, so there was a lot of Batman consciousness. Now, I hadn't thought about the comic strips in 30 or 40 years, and I hadn't read them since I was a very young boy. I stopped, maybe, around 13 or 14, okay? So I was walking and I happened to see something I had never seen before in my whole life — a comic-book store. I wasn't even aware there were such things.

DAN: *All over the place now.*

NATHANIEL: Yes, but I didn't know that. And I walked in out of curiosity. I had some time that I was free, and I just wandered around out of sheer curiosity. I was impressed by the artwork, this beautiful-looking book that looked like a serious book, of THE DARK KNIGHT RETURNS. And I really was first attracted to it visually, because it seemed so well done. And then I began to read it, and I was just impressed by the overall artistic quality, by the nature of the stylization, and by the sense that whoever **Frank Miller** was, whoever had done this has serious artistic ability. I had never before thought about comic strips — with one exception — as reflecting serious artistic ability. The one exception was **Burne Hogarth,** who did the TARZAN comic strips, because in that case, one couldn't escape being aware that this was a brilliant, brilliant artist.

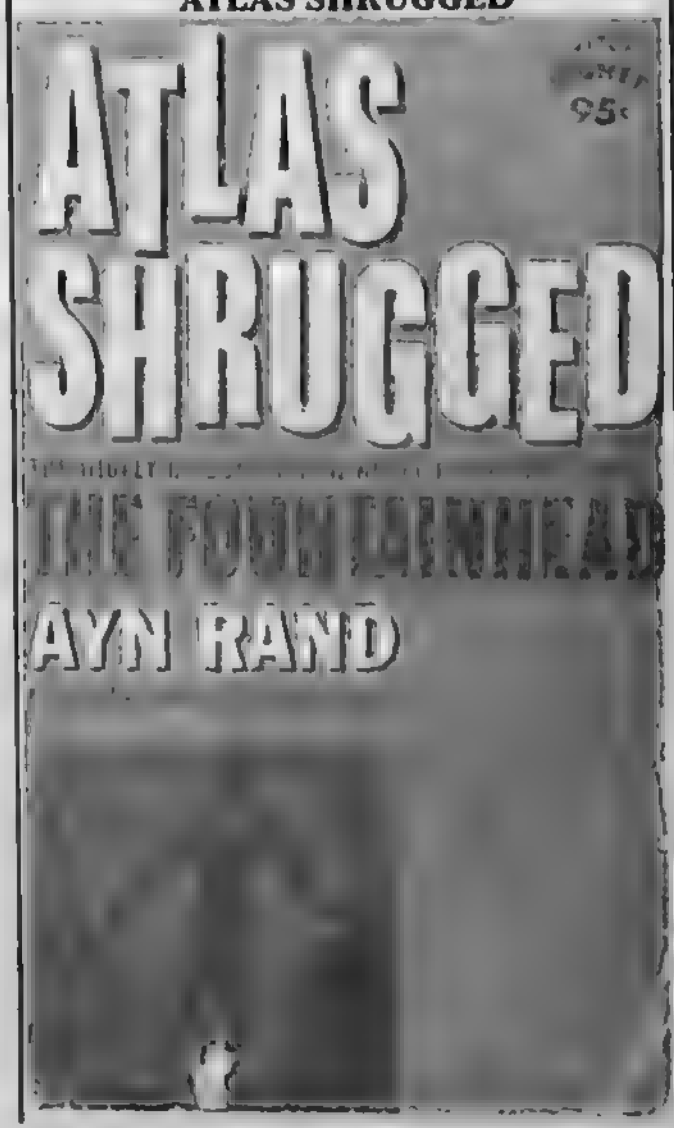
DAN: *Right. And you say it sort of came as a surprise to you that Frank Miller was influenced by Ayn Rand?*

NATHANIEL: Well, the one reason why that surprised me is that his view of life seems to be rather dark . . .

DAN: *He says everyone accuses him of that.*

NATHANIEL: Well, if one reads him, it's not difficult to see why. He creates that impression. Now granted that Batman, if you take it seriously, is a tragic figure who is still trying to solve, or work off, a childhood trauma. Even so, my memory of the BATMAN comic strips that I read as a child were that they were

ATLAS SHRUGGED



DARK KNIGHT: "The quality, the stylization,

[illegible] ... AND [illegible] -- ARE THE QUALITY AND THE STYLIZATION THAT HAS BROUGHT A MORE CENTER [illegible] -- THE RETURN OF THE BATMAN.
TONIGHT, WE WILL EXAMINE HIS IMPACT ON OUR CONSCIOUSNESS. FROM METROPOLIS -- WE HAVE LOIS LANE, MANAGING EDITOR OF THE DAILY PLANET...
...JOINING US FROM GOTHAM CITY -- DR. BARTHOLEMEW WOLPER POPULAR PSYCHOLOGIST AND SOCIAL SCIENTIST, AUTHOR OF THE BEST-SELLING "HEY--I'M OKAY"...
...WITH US TONIGHT FROM HIS OFFICE IN WASHINGTON -- PRESIDENTIAL MENTAL ADVISOR CHUCK BRICK.
DR. WOLPER -- YOU HAVE CLAIMED THAT THE BATMAN IS -- HIMSELF RESPONSIBLE FOR THE CRIMES HE FIGHTS. [illegible] CRIME RATES HAVE SHOWN A STEADY DROP IN THE MONTHS SINCE HIS RETURN. HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN THIS?
I'M GLAD YOU ASKED ME THAT QUESTION, TED. IT IS TRUE THAT THIS BATMAN HAS TERRORIZED THE ECONOMICALLY DISADVANTAGED AND SOCIALLY MISALIGNED -- BUT HIS EFFECTS ARE FAR FROM POSITIVE.
PICTURE THE PUBLIC PSYCHE AS A VAST, MOIST MEMBRANE -- THROUGH THE MEDIA, BATMAN HAS STRUCK THIS MEMBRANE A VICIOUS BLOW. AND IT HAS RECOILED. HENCE YOUR MISLEADING STATISTICS.
BUT YOU SEE, TED, THE MEMBRANE IS FLEXIBLE -- AND PERMEABLE. HERE THE MORE SIGNIFICANT EFFECTS OF THE BLOW BECOME CALCULABLE, EVEN PREDICTABLE. TO WIT --

"Talking heads" from Frank Miller's DARK KNIGHT RETURNS.

somewhat lighter and perhaps more humorous, and didn't stress the pathological side of Batman — used, in effect, the fact that his parents had been killed by a mugger or whatever essentially as an excuse to launch him into the career . . .

DAN: *True.*

NATHANIEL: It was just a device to explain why he devoted his life to fighting crime, and not something that one was meant to take seriously as a portrait of who Batman was. And since my memory — I hope it's correct — of the early BATMAN comic books was that there was quite a bit of humor and absurdity in them, it reinforced the idea that it was all kind of good fun.

DAN: *All that is true, though it was darker, I think, in the first year — before Robin was introduced into the series. That lightened it up a lot.*

NATHANIEL: That's my memory, right.

DAN: *I was also thinking, of course, that you were one of the lucky ones. You were about eight years old when Superman first appeared, I think.*

NATHANIEL: I was born in 1939.

DAN: *And he appeared in 1938, so I envy you that experience.*

NATHANIEL: Superman and Batman and Tarzan were my three favorites.

DAN: *On the Frank Miller thing, I don't remember if I realized he was influenced by Rand before I read DARK KNIGHT or not, but in any case I could see it there in the sense of society's reaction to Batman. There he is acting — fighting crime — while everyone else debates on TV. All these damn talking heads say, "Is he good? Is he bad? He's a monster." Things like that, very much like, for example, Howard Roark.*

NATHANIEL: Oh, I see what you mean. That's interesting. Very interesting.

DAN: *Not only that, but Frank did a similar thing in the screenplay he wrote for ROBOCOP 2. I don't know if you saw that . . .?*

NATHANIEL: Yes, I did.

DAN: *The committee that's sitting around the table which reprograms Robocop with socially conscious messages that are all contradictory, you know? And Robocop basically is nonfunctional after that. That's sort of Frank's satiric take on the idea that you can have all these contradictory — quote/unquote — "positive social messages."*

NATHANIEL: The thing that surprises me about that is that ROBOCOP is so anti-business, and seems to be so anti-free enterprise, that I'm surprised that that would come out of somebody influenced by **Ayn Rand.**

DAN: *Well, of course, Frank didn't write the original ROBOCOP. That was other people. But he did ROBOCOP 2 and 3, so this is a filtering-in influence, in a way.*

NATHANIEL: I see what you mean.

DAN: *The Rand influence, it seems to me, is surprisingly widespread in comics. There's Frank Miller, Spider-Man's co-creator Steve Ditko, David Anthony Kraft, who's the publisher of this magazine, and several others . . .*

NATHANIEL: How interesting.

DAN: *Do you think there's any significance there?*

NATHANIEL: Well, yes, the obvious

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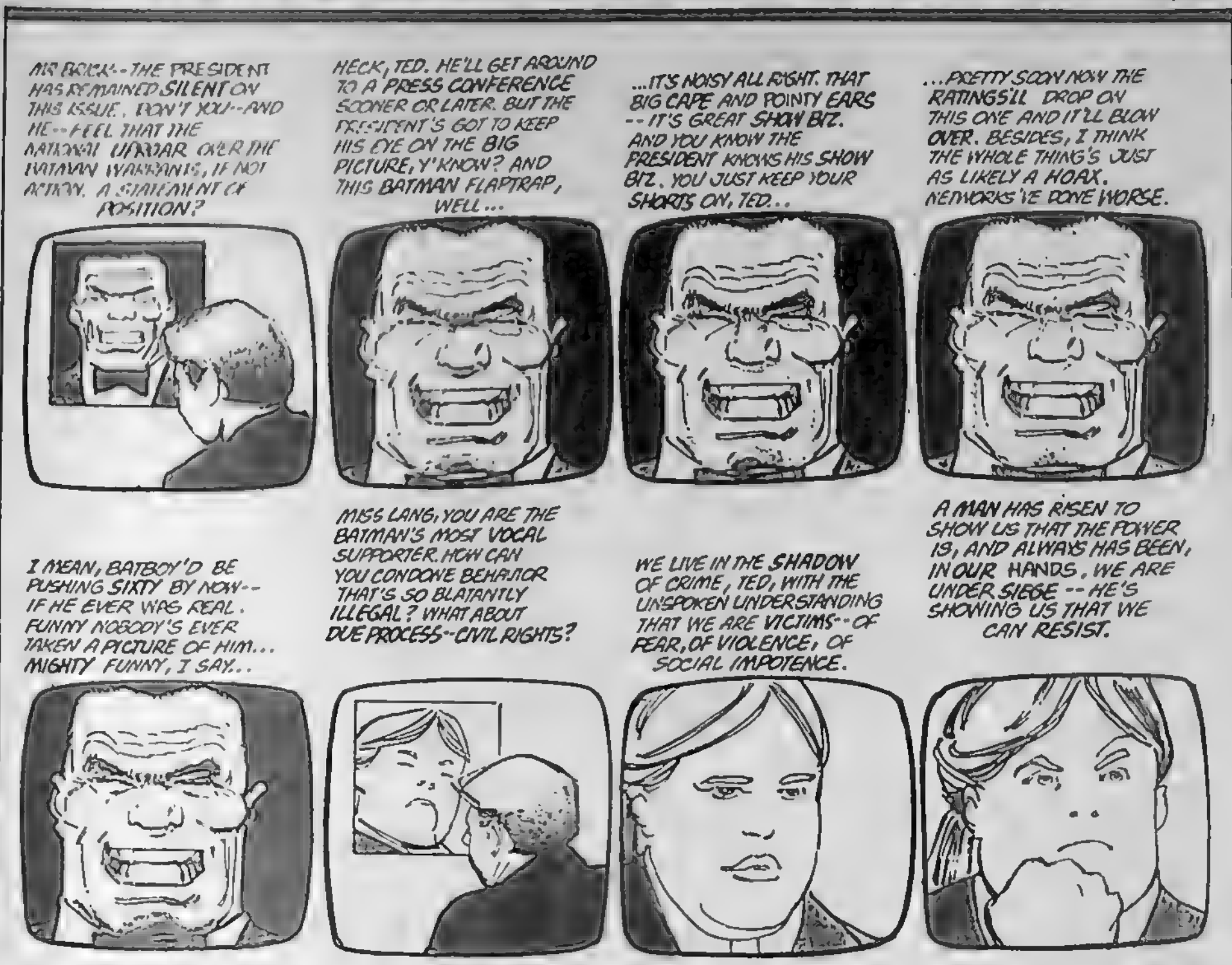
whoever had done this has serious artistic ability."


AH BRICK--THE PRESIDENT HAS REMAINED SILENT ON THIS ISSUE. DON'T YOU--AND ME--FEEL THAT THE NATIONAL UPROAR OVER THE BATMAN WARRANTS, IF NOT ACTION, A STATEMENT OF POSITION?
HECK, TED. HE'LL GET AROUND TO A PRESS CONFERENCE SOONER OR LATER. BUT THE PRESIDENT'S GOT TO KEEP HIS EYE ON THE BIG PICTURE, Y'KNOW? AND THIS BATMAN FLAPTRAP, WELL...
...IT'S NOISY ALL RIGHT. THAT BIG CAPE AND POINTY EARS -- IT'S GREAT SHOW BIZ. AND YOU KNOW THE PRESIDENT KNOWS HIS SHOW BIZ. YOU JUST KEEP YOUR SHORTS ON, TED..
...PRETTY SOON NOW THE RATINGS'LL DROP ON THIS ONE AND IT'LL BLOW OVER. BESIDES, I THINK THE WHOLE THING'S JUST AS LIKELY A HOAX. NETWORKS'VE DONE WORSE.
I MEAN, BATBOY'D BE PUSHING SIXTY BY NOW-- IF HE EVER WAS REAL. FUNNY NOBODY'S EVER TAKEN A PICTURE OF HIM... MIGHTY FUNNY, I SAY..
MISS LANG, YOU ARE THE BATMAN'S MOST VOCAL SUPPORTER. HOW CAN YOU CONDONE BEHAVIOR THAT'S SO BLATANTLY ILLEGAL? WHAT ABOUT DUE PROCESS--CIVIL RIGHTS?
WE LIVE IN THE SHADOW OF CRIME, TED, WITH THE UNSPOKEN UNDERSTANDING THAT WE ARE VICTIMS--OF FEAR, OF VIOLENCE, OF SOCIAL IMPOTENCE.
A MAN HAS RISEN TO SHOW US THAT THE POWER IS, AND ALWAYS HAS BEEN, IN OUR HANDS. WE ARE UNDER SIEGE -- HE'S SHOWING US THAT WE CAN RESIST.

thing I think of is this: What are comic strips of my youth? — and I say "my youth" because they're very different today. And the ones today that I've seen, I don't like. They are sick, they are morbid, they are totally unromantic by comparison with what I read when I was a boy. But they are a kind of child's projection of the heroic. They are a reaching for some vision of the human being as potentially a heroic being. Granted, the terms of the heroism are almost exclusively physical . . .

DAN: *Right.*

NATHANIEL: But that also is a child's perspective, because a child is not yet able to understand intellectual or spiritual forms of heroism.

DAN: *Right. Physical and, I would argue, symbolic in many ways.*

NATHANIEL: Symbolic, metaphoric, that's right. So I think that another reason is, most comic-strip superheroes are very alienated from the world in which they live, and that also would apply to a character like Howard Roark, for example. They are all the outsiders. They are all doing good work, but are, in many ways, unappreciated, misunderstood or even opposed. Those abstractions. So from that point of view, yes, I can see the logic of it, although it never would have occurred to me if you hadn't told me.

DAN: *Very good. Would you like to recount the JUDGMENT DAY anecdote about your childhood heroes for the benefit of the readers, or may I just quote that passage from the book?*

NATHANIEL: I'm embarrassed to tell you that since I've told that story more than once, would you kindly tell me? I don't know whether I told the full version in JUDGMENT DAY.

DAN: *Okay. I just reread it, so it's pretty fresh in my mind. Ayn Rand asked you who your childhood heroes were, and you said, "Well, the Lone Ranger, then Superman, then the Scarlet Pimpernel." Then you paused and wondered if there was any significance in the fact that they were all, in a sense, invisible men — disguised, the secret identity thing. And Rand told you that obviously your intelligence had grown, explaining how you integrated the values of those heroes into your life in a real way, but also said that, yes, it was significant that they were disguised or invisible, because of a sense of isolation you had.*

NATHANIEL: That's the version that I thought I told there. There's a longer story.

DAN: *That I'd love to hear.*

NATHANIEL: There's a slightly longer story which went like this: My first childhood hero was the Lone Ranger, at least that's the first one I can remember. That was around five or six, I think, when he first came out. I could be wrong in my memory. What year did the Lone Ranger come out?

DAN: *About 33 or so.*

NATHANIEL: That's right, so my memory is correct. Okay. And the next one was Superman, and Batman, all right? Then, at 13, I discovered the novels of an English female novelist, **Baroness Orczy.** Her novels about the Scarlet Pimpernel. Of course, that was a big jump upward from the Lone Ranger, Superman or Batman, because now it was a little closer to reality. And I remember being emotionally inspired

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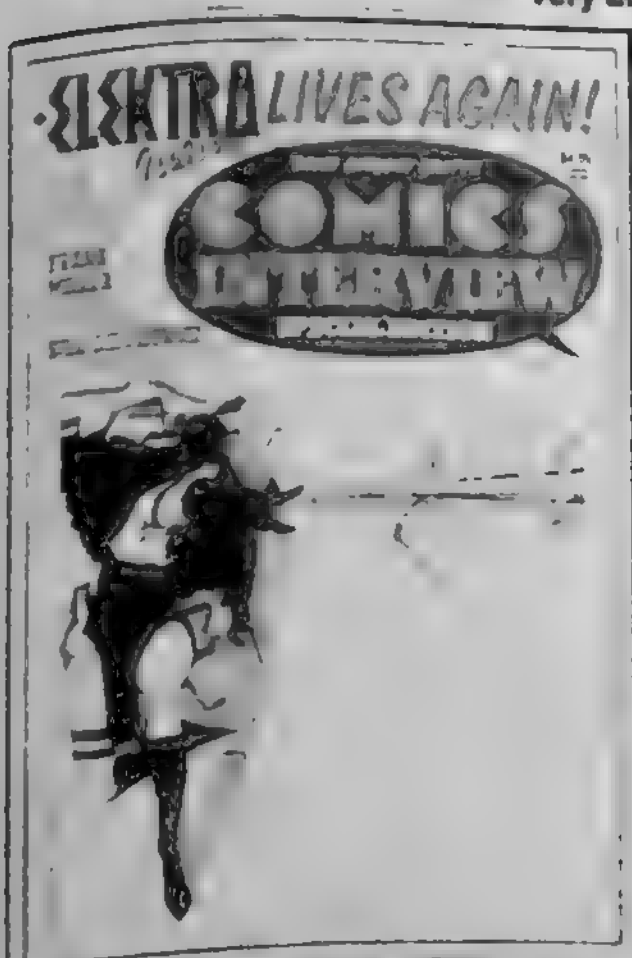

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"I began to think about work as a heroic endeavor."

and excited by the Scarlet Pimpernel, but I also remember, incredibly clearly, walking the streets of Toronto and struggling with this question. It's now 1943. "I am not seriously interested, as a life work, in rescuing French aristocrats from the guillotine, especially since there aren't any . . ."

DAN: (Laughter.) *Right.*

NATHANIEL: ". . . but there is something in that that I do like and want in my life, and I have no idea what it is." A year later, in 1944, I read THE FOUNTAINHEAD. And then the revelation came, because that, for me, was the translation into adult, real-life terms of some of the moral abstractions that I had seen in those earlier creations. I began to think about work as a potentially heroic endeavor. I began to think about the moral importance of independence. And for me, as Rand points out in the incident that I did tell about in JUDGMENT DAY, it was as if the models kept changing in step with my growing intelligence, but the core abstractions were already formed at the comic-strip level — heroism, courage, independence, self-reliance.

DAN: *Yes, I had a similar experience, I think. My own were Superman and Batman and Spider-Man, then James Bond and Sherlock Holmes and Quiller, a character I don't know if you know . . .?*

NATHANIEL: I just finished the new Quiller novel.

DAN: *Are you serious?*

NATHANIEL: Sure.

DAN: *Elleston Trevor is a great friend of mine. I've done interviews with him for years.*

NATHANIEL: Really?

DAN: *Yeah. "Adam Hall." He lives over in Phoenix.*

NATHANIEL: He's American, isn't he?

DAN: *He's British.*

NATHANIEL: He's British. He writes from the British perspective, but somebody had told me he was American.

DAN: *He was in the RAF during World War II. He had light-sensitive eyes, so he couldn't fly the Spitfires because of the likelihood of being sun-blinded in battle. So he was a mechanic, and he started writing novels then and has done so ever since.*

NATHANIEL: Please tell him that I'm a very enthusiastic fan and read everything he writes.

DAN: *Certainly. Don't be surprised if he gets in touch with you.*

NATHANIEL: Tell him I'd love to hear from him.

Leslie Howard as THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL (1935).

DAN: *I discovered his novels in high school, and thought, "Now, here is a hero." Quiller, again, is the Randite thing — devotion to work, the mission is all, and an utter individualist, too, of course.*

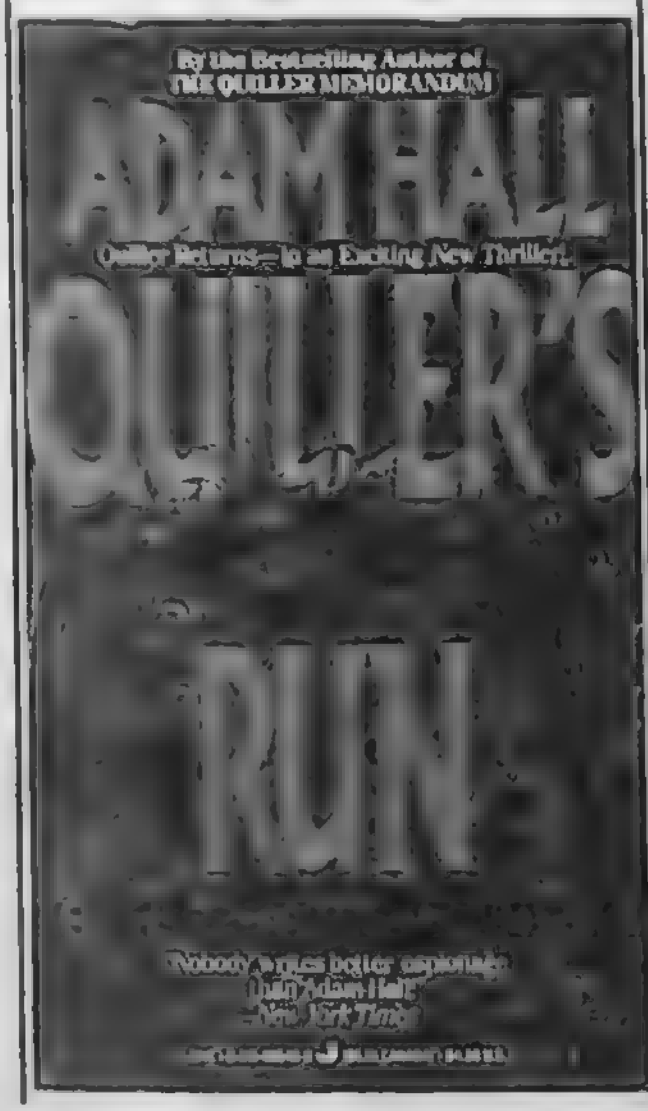
NATHANIEL: Yes, yes, yes. He's a very good writer.

DAN: *What a stylist. The way he hits you from out of left field with those scenes of violence.*

NATHANIEL: Tell him I'd love to hear from him, and tell him he's very, very good at what he does. What are there, maybe 10 Quiller novels?

DAN: *More like 14, 15, 16 now.*

NATHANIEL: To the best of my knowledge, I have read everything of his. The one I've just finished is called QUILLER BAMBOO.



DAN: *There's one after that, QUILLER SOLITAIRE, which I recently readin proof. In the new one, he's back in Berlin. The Red Army Faction has broken up, and one faction has gone wild and Quiller's got to stop them. It's back to THE QUILLER MEMORANDUM, sort of, but in the post-Cold War age. But in addition to Quiller, of course, I discovered Howard Roark and the Rand heroes, and for me, too, it coalesced the idea that an heroic, adventuresome sense of life could be incorporated into one's own work on a real-life level, among many other things. In the sense, though, of those early heroes of yours being the superhero type — all of them with secret identities — do you think Rand was right there? Did it reflect . . .?*

NATHANIEL: Oh, yes. I would be delighted if you would quote that conversation from JUDGMENT DAY, amplifying it, if you wish, by what I've said on the subject .

DAN: *Sure. That would be a great way to open, because it's beautifully written. So it's the sense of isolation, you think? Is that, in part, what it was reflecting?*

NATHANIEL: Also the feeling that I'm really a good human being, and it's not yet understood by people.

DAN: *Right. Which is where I was going to take that, in regard to the Muttnik principle . . .*

NATHANIEL: *(Laughter.)*

DAN: *You see where I'm going?*

NATHANIEL: Yes.

DAN: *(Laughter.)* Well, you take it.

NATHANIEL: Well, we all have, by our natures, a very legitimate and important need for visibility. We are social beings. We are not meant to to live in isolation, and we have a natural desire to have who and what we are perceived and understood by fellow human beings. And so the Muttnik principle is just a somewhat humorous way of talking about the name for the desire for visibility. Let me spin off of this and tell you a story that might interest you.

DAN: *Sure.*

NATHANIEL: Last year, I was invited by the FBI to come and talk about my work in self-esteem and its importance to some of their people, to a very elite group of FBI people who do very valuable, very important work — counter-terrorism and other kinds of secret work, high-risk work. These are not the people who walk around in suits, but who very often walk around in blue jeans. They are the undercover people very often. For ex-

"The danger and tragedy of most people's

Superman (below, played by Gary Jackson) falls under the spell of the villainous Dr. Sedgwick (Gabriel Barre) in the musical comedy IT'S A BIRD, IT'S A PLANE, IT'S SUPERMAN, proving even Superman can be vulnerable to a lack of self-esteem.

lives is they remain a comic-strip fantasy."

ample, during the Gulf War, there were a lot of predictions that there would be Iraq-inspired acts of terrorism in this country. There were none. And the credit for that went to this group in the FBI. But the public didn't know about it, nobody know about it, and yet what they did was often very tough, very dangerous. A lot of it they couldn't even talk to their families about.

DAN: *So this is Quiller/James Bond stuff?*

NATHANIEL: Exactly. So I built my talk around the psychological dimension of heroism, which is much harder than the physical dimension. The physical dimension might mean hiding in a closet for 36 hours in a Mafia establishment in order to plant a bug, knowing that if you're found, you could be killed.

DAN: *Um hmm.*

NATHANIEL: That's the physical heroism. Deeper than that is the psychological heroism of knowing that you're doing something important, almost nobody knows about it, and you can't tell anybody about. I said, "There is a slogan that I would like to see you put up on the walls of your offices — 'It isn't what they think. It's what I know.'"

DAN: *Right. Good point. Did you come up with that one?*

NATHANIEL: Yes. I have to say they were wonderful. I got a huge standing ovation. For me, the real challenge was to find some way to make my work useful to people from another world, you know, than mine.

DAN: *The shadow world.*

NATHANIEL: And I really admired these men and women, because what they did and do was quite extraordinary, and essentially unknown and therefore not appreciated by the general public. Now, the interesting thing is that you take that abstraction — the abstraction of what they do — well, that's what the childhood comic strips were chiefly about.

DAN: *Exactly. And the visibility/Muttnik principle again. In some sense, I see one of those wonderful Rand-like contradictions here which resolves itself. The heroes of your childhood were — quote/unquote — "invisible," but they were invisible because you wanted to be visible. The secret self, the heroic self — that's what you wanted people to see.*

NATHANIEL: That's right. Very good observation.

DAN: *So in some ways, the superhero is a symbol, often, for that — that the hidden self, the secret self is the real self, and it's better.*

NATHANIEL: That's right.

DAN: *"If only people know who I really am."*

NATHANIEL: But then you know, the danger, and the tragedy of most people's lives, is that they let it stay there, meaning they let it remain a comic-strip fantasy. You see, the real challenge of maturity is to keep the abstraction, but to grow out of the concrete.

DAN: *Exactly.*

NATHANIEL: In other words, to find what are the adult forms of living that, so that it's not merely a daydream, or a loser's consolation prize.

DAN: *Exactly. You don't want to be Paddy Chayefsky's Marty.*

NATHANIEL: Exactly.

DAN: *Dreaming of being Mike Hammer.*

NATHANIEL: Exactly.

DAN: *You know, I've thought that out of many passages, the most moving passage of Rand's writing to me is the introduction to the 25th anniversary edition of THE FOUNTAINHEAD, in which she talks about that.*

NATHANIEL: I know exactly what you mean. I always liked that. I share your view of it. And that could work very well as a focuser for what you and I are talking about now.

DAN: *It nearly moved me to tears, at times, reading that.*

NATHANIEL: Yes. It was marvelous, it was marvelous.

DAN: *Because I've known people who have died out like that, you know?*

NATHANIEL: That's right. People often ask me what do I think of daydreams. And what I say about daydreams, I would also say about the best of those comic strips of my childhood. A daydream that inspires you to action, eventually, is a good daydream. One that becomes your substitute for action is dangerous to you. And the same thing is what I would say about the best of those comic strips. If they inspire you — if you use it as energy to live more heroically in real-life, adult terms — then they have performed one of the most important services of romantic art. But if instead they become merely a kind of alternative reality, where in your dreams you're somebody daring and brave and courageous, but in your actual life you are a mediocrity who never aspires to anything at all challenging . . .

DAN: *And who cowers.*

NATHANIEL: Then the problem is that they helped you stay passive, rather than inspire you to become active.

DAN: *So it all depends on the context.*

NATHANIEL: It all depends on the context, and it all depends on what the individual makes of the experience of reading the stories.

DAN: *Um hmm. You know, I was coming up with notes for this last night, and one thing which struck me is that I find it significant that John Galt was, in a sense, also an invisible, disguised hero, you know what I mean?*

NATHANIEL: That's right, that's right.

DAN: *I kept thinking about it, and I thought, "We've got, in effect, the Scarlet Pimpernel here."*

NATHANIEL: That's right. Well, Francisco is really the Scarlet Pimpernel. He is visible, but visible in a fake way, where he's faking a public personna . . .

DAN: *Right. The Scarlet Pimpernel or Batman. He's the playboy poseur.*

NATHANIEL: Exactly.

DAN: *But I was thinking of the Scarlet Pimpernel, too, in the sense of Dagny Taggart's search for "Who is John Galt?" — the man who embodies her values, and whom she is mistakenly trying to*

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destroy. It parallels Marguerite Blakeney's search for the Scarlet Pimpernel, whom she is inadvertently trying to destroy, and yet he is in fact her husband and the man she's in love with but she doesn't know it. Which is, I always thought, one beautiful plot complication.

NATHANIEL: It sure is.

DAN: *Um, let me see here. All right, a couple of different questions, just to see what strikes you as a psychologist. Here's another thing: The most popular superheroes are almost always orphans. Superman, Batman, Spider-Man, Captain Marvel, the Lone Ranger, Doc Savage, James Bond.*

NATHANIEL: Tarzan.

DAN: *Right, Tarzan. And, we might add, Howard Roark and John Galt, seemingly.*

NATHANIEL: Um hmm.

DAN: *There are no parents in evidence, anyway. What's the significance of that, do you think? Does anything spring to mind?*

NATHANIEL: Yes. I think the intention is very, very American, and it's this idea. Part of the American vision is that the individual can create himself, can invent himself. And I think that the way that you dramatize independence is by showing the lack of the usual external resources or sources of help that average people have. So what you do is, you dramatize self-sufficiency and independence and self-invention.

DAN: *Fascinating. I hadn't thought of it in quite that way. I'd read those who've suggested that, for example, America is about cutting yourself off from the European past, so there's that analogy. We're about, in some ways, cutting yourself off from the European past and, as you say, creating ourselves anew. I also thought that part of the orphan thing may be that, to really be this outstanding hero, you don't need your mother hovering around, who changed your diapers, you know. Who remembers you powerless.*

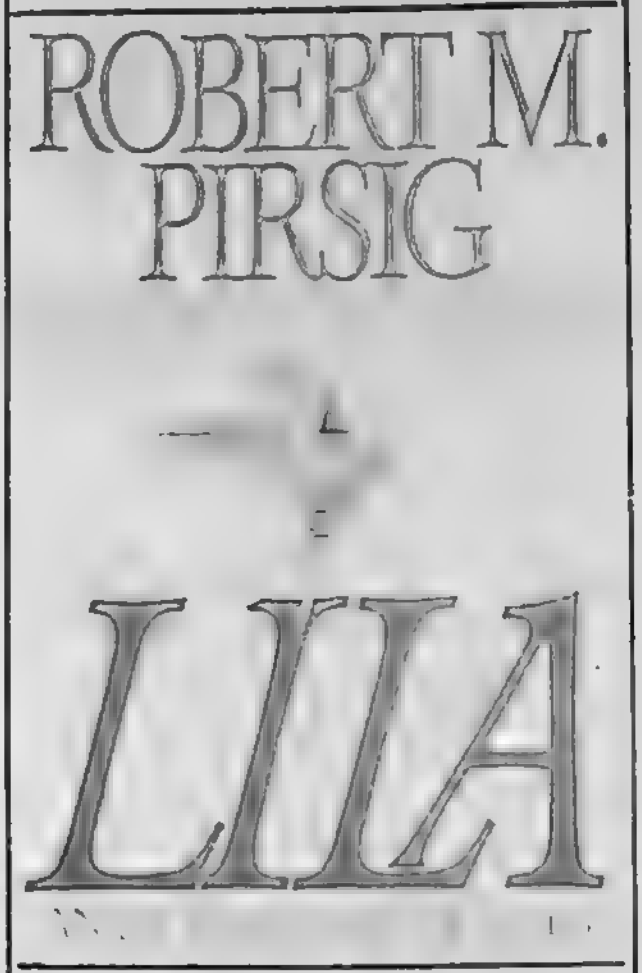
NATHANIEL: Well, that is also true, I'm sure. It's also interesting, though I don't know how relevant this is, that the first two Superman movies were really one movie. It was too long and they broke it up into two.

DAN: *Exactly, yeah.*

NATHANIEL: And the basic storyline was, as you know, created by **Mario Puzo.** And I remember reading an interview when he talked about his struggles to figure out how do you tell this story. And he made the point, of course, that it's really a tragedy. And if you think it through deeply enough, the first two were very, very good, and really told the story of Superman. The rest was all superfluous.

DAN: *Right. I agree completely.*

NATHANIEL: And this is so, so American. That tremendous emphasis on aloneness. Whether it's part of our frontier heritage, I don't know. Whether it partly comes from the Indians, I don't know. Because I suspect that a lot of what we call "uniquely American" is fed by kind of subterranean waters by at least some aspects of Indian culture. But I don't know enough to really be able to



support, very strongly, what I'm saying.

DAN: *That hadn't occurred to me, really. I always think of the European derivation.*

NATHANIEL: Think of the plainsman. Think of the Indians, in a relatively small number, on these gigantic, gigantic plains.

DAN: *Dwarfed by the scenery.*

NATHANIEL: Exactly. You know the guy who wrote ZEN AND THE ART OF MOTORCYCLE MAINTENANCE?

DAN: *Persig, yeah. Robert Persig.*

NATHANIEL: He has a new novel out called LILA. You might find it interesting to read his research, because he talks a lot about the influence of the Indian culture on American culture.

DAN: *Good. Yes, I'll pick that up. I read ZEN in college in philosophy class.*

NATHANIEL: How old are you now?

DAN: *38.*

NATHANIEL: I was 38 once.

DAN: (Laughter.) *Actually, I'm sorry, I'm 37. I turn 38 in a couple of weeks. But you start thinking of yourself ahead of time, you know? The SUPERMAN movies. To me, the key moment of those two movies — the one that really sticks out in my mind — is where he's lying on the floor and been beaten up by that truck driver. You remember that?*

NATHANIEL: Sure.

DAN: *And he looks at his hand and he says, "Blood! It's my blood." A powerless Superman — utterly alone, there. And the world needs him. I really loved that scene.*

NATHANIEL: Of course. Well, we seem to have a lot of agreement.

DAN: (Laughter.) *Yes, we do. Another thing I was going to bring up is that the myths, of course, have a psychological aspect, as they must. For example, Moses and Perseus were cast upon the waters, vulnerable, as babes, to be raised by foster parents very different from their actual parents. And Superman, the same thing happens to him.*

NATHANIEL: That's a very interesting comparison to draw.

DAN: *I wonder what the significance is there? These universal myths, do they have universal psychological meaning, and what do we want out of them?*

NATHANIEL: *(Pause.)* I have never thought about that. I'm sure I would have an answer if I thought for five minutes.

DAN: *Springing this stuff on you, I know, is tricky.*

NATHANIEL: Again, I think of what I've already said about aloneness and self-creation and a way of dramatizing independence. And the way of dramatizing the American promise that you can start all over again, and create yourself. You can be what you want to be. Now, that hardly explains Moses, who, so far as I know, was not an American . . .

DAN: *This has ancient roots, too, this story that's told over and over again. Almost always, from what I read of the mythologists, the child, the foundling, is raised by parents of opposite station than his original parents. If he was of humble parents, he is raised by kingly or godly parents. If he's the son of God, he's raised by the most humble folk possible. That needs to be explored. But another thing I did want to touch on is the significant of flight in fantasy psychologically, since that plays so much of a role in super-*

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On Ayn Rand: "Oh, yes. She was a genius."

heroes. Even Batman and Spider-Man swing on lines. They sort of imitate flight, you know.

NATHANIEL: Well, I think that that is observed in how common are childhood dreams of flying. I think that is the natural impulse to be free, to rise above where one has been, to not be pulled back by the gravitational pressures of family or society. I think that it's a very natural fulfillment of a metaphoric dream. Everybody wants to fly, and the metaphor for that is literal flying. The flying they want is not physical, but spiritual.

DAN: *Right.*

NATHANIEL: But it's symbolized through flight. Flight is kind of an ecstatic experience of freedom. So if we imagine being able to fly around the sky like Superman does, it kind of stands as an incredible experience of freedom. And what will you hear somebody say who's going down the ski slopes at a great speed? "What a high it was! It was almost like flying. I felt like I was flying." Or somebody driving on a motorcycle, making a similar statement, you see. Or if a person is feeling emotionally or spiritually very high, you might hear them say, "Man, I was flying!"

DAN: *Right. And those words are significant.*

NATHANIEL: Exactly.

DAN: *Thank you very much for that. That was well-put. I keep thinking, too, of the bold, primary-colored, skintight costume. Someone had written somewhere that perhaps that perhaps that represents a kind of colorful nakedness. The hidden self, again. There's something about that, too, because that seems to be* de regeur *for superheroes.*

NATHANIEL: Well, I think, in part, it's a means of showing off this highly muscled, powerful body.

DAN: *And of standing out from the crowd, certainly.*

NATHANIEL: And of standing out from the crowd. And maybe there are other meanings, such as colorful nakedness, to use your phrase.

DAN: *An historian of costume design had suggested that the cape and so forth goes back to aristocratic dress. Maybe it resonates with that within us. Or circus wear, or both. What else here? You said you were working on a new book. When's that coming out and what's it about?*

NATHANIEL: Well, the book is called THE SIX PILLARS OF SELF-ESTEEM. It's my most ambitious and comprehensive look at the various factors which influence the level of an

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individual's self-esteem. We look in the book, first of all, at the individual's actions or practices or ways of operating, how they affect self-esteem. Then we look at the belief system, or the guiding philosophical ideas of the individual. Then we look at the role of child-rearing. Then we look at the role of experiences in the school system. And in the case of child-rearing and the school system, obviously the orientation is, "What could parents and teachers do that would have a positive effect upon a young person's self-esteem?" Then we shift to business organizations, where people spend so much of their time, and look at, "What would an organization look like geared to human self-esteem?"

DAN: *Oh. That's very valuable.*

NATHANIEL: Then we look at psychotherapy. What can psychotherapy contribute to self-esteem? Finally, I look at culture. Are cultures equal or different in whether they support or undermine self-esteem, and what would a culture of self-esteem look like? So it's a kind of global look at the issue.

DAN: *When will it be out?*

NATHANIEL: Oh, not for about 18 months. I brought out a small book just a few months ago, called THE POWER OF SELF-ESTEEM by Health Communications. That's pretty widely available now. My regular publisher is doing the big book. That's Bantam Books.

DAN: *I also wanted to ask you about Rand. I always thought the great irony of Ayn Rand was that she preached reason and liberty, and yet demanded strict obedience.*

NATHANIEL: Well, of course, you're right. That is the great contradiction.

DAN: *How could she do that? How could she not see that?*

NATHANIEL: Oh, I would say since she identified her personal preferences with the voice of reason . . .

DAN: *And metaphysical truth?*

NATHANIEL: And metaphysical truth. I did write about this somewhat in the book.

DAN: *And I'm sure I have seen it.*

NATHANIEL: Yes. You don't need that for your comic-strip interview . . .

DAN: *No. I was just curious. This is for my own purposes.*

NATHANIEL: Maybe one day we'll meet in person and we can discuss this. Do you live in Chicago?

DAN: *South of Chicago. It's about four hours south of Chicago. We get up there, though. I just wanted to ask you this, too. She was great, wasn't she?*

NATHANIEL: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. She was a genius.

DAN: *Her influence will continue to be felt, I think, for a long, long time.*

NATHANIEL: It will be felt, and often it will show up in ways that people will not necessarily know. That's the nature of the universe, you know. Nobody, each time he says or does something, can announce all of the influences of his life. But yes, I'm quite convinced her influence will persist.

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LAST WORD

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MARVEL SHOULD NOT BE SATISFIED UNTIL IT HAS 100% OF THE MARKET

Dear Mr. Kraft,

I usually do not write letters to comics or their related magazines; however, the interview with **Dennis Mallonee** in issue #112 of your publication has caused me to voice my opinion.

Mr. Mallonee, a publisher of his own line of comics, uses your magazine as a forum for his views on the industry. Now, everyone is entitled to their opinion, but, they are also entitled to be proven wrong for said opinion.

As a marketing executive with a frozen foods firm, I am well-versed with the hows and whys of business. And, as a former manager of a comic-book store, I am also familiar with the comics industry. So when **Mr. Mallonee** speaks of how wrong the industry is for not snatching up his line in huge amounts, I recognize his arguments as those of someone crying "Sour Grapes."

He points to the wrongful practices of retailers for being the reason why his "good product" does not sell. To back up his argument, he points out that, in a perfect world, his comic, FLARE, would outsell most Marvel and DC books because it provides a higher dollar value for retailers. While it is true that a $3.95 comic would bring in a higher profit than a $1.25 comic on a per-book basis, the question is would it be worth it to the retailer to order more of this comic than the Marvel comic? The answer, for the average retailer, is "No", for two reasons. Reason #1 relates to a marketing phenomenon known as Brand Loyalty. Basically, this means the consumer will always buy the brand that they are comfortable with. In the comics industry, those brands are Marvel and DC. It makes no sense to a retailer to stock his shelves with unfamiliar brands and neglect Marvel and DC books, when he knows that they will be the books that his customers reach for first.

Reason #2 deals with the Price Increase Theory of Economics. This states that as price increases on an item, demand will decrease as potential buyers can no longer afford the item. If all retailers were to follow **Mr. Mallonee's** logic and only order the more-expensive

SHADOW OF THE BAT!

items because they have the biggest profit margins, then all car dealerships would stock only Porsches and Ferraris, because they are the cars with the biggest profit margins. At $3.95, Hero Comics are beyond the limit of what most fans are willing to spend on a monthly book. They would much rather buy three Marvels or DCs for $3.75 than one Hero for $3.95. To further explain the problem, were an average retailer to order 100 copies each of CAPTAIN AMERICA and FLARE, and display them equally, he would still face problems afterwards. If he sells 90 CAPs (brand loyalty) but only 29 FLAREs, his profits on both are almost equal, but then he is faced with the cost of inventory on the 61 FLAREs he did not sell and the money lost on the purchase of the 61 unsold FLAREs from the distributor.

The end of the argument is, until a Hero Comic comes out that is so great that word-of-mouth (the most effective form of promotion) causes fans to demand it from retailers, orders for Hero books will float at the current levels. And, before **Mr. Mallonee** starts to scream that his books are that good now, let me point out that, if that were the case, then we would have seen Hero Comics make the same move that Valiant has years ago.

Later in the same interview, **Mr. Mallonee** gives his views on marketing, and once again, misses the point entirely. Although I, as a comics fan, do not like Marvel's sudden use of multiple covers and special second printings, etc., as a businessman, I see that they are doing nothing wrong. **Mr. Mallonee** states that "Marvel is not in the business of selling comic books. Marvel is in the business (of) pushing itself trying to increase market share." **Mr. Mallonee,** every smart company has one goal and one goal only, and that is to be on top. In order to be on top, you must have the largest share of the market. Marvel is a smart company and they have achieved just that. But once you get on top, you don't stop trying to gain a larger share. Where's the business sense in that? An industry leader with 99% of the market should not be satisfied until it has 100%. Marvel's marketing department is to be applauded for being good business-people for finding ways to increase their piece of the pie without losing their retailer support. In **Mr. Mallonee's** opinion, it may not be ethical marketing, but it's good marketing.

I apologize for being so harsh towards **Mr. Mallonee,** but he needs to wake up and smell the coffee. If he truly wants his company to succeed in the industry, and I hope it does because I believe that the industry as a whole benefits with a wide diversity of publishers and books, he must realize that it is a business out there. He can't expect that his line will sell out every month because he thinks it's good. He must not only produce the best books he can, but then he must promote, and advertise, and market his line. He must schmooze with retailers at conventions and have sales reps available to be contacted over any problems. He must do good business.

Sorry to drag on for so long, but I just wanted to get my views across.

Garret Michaels
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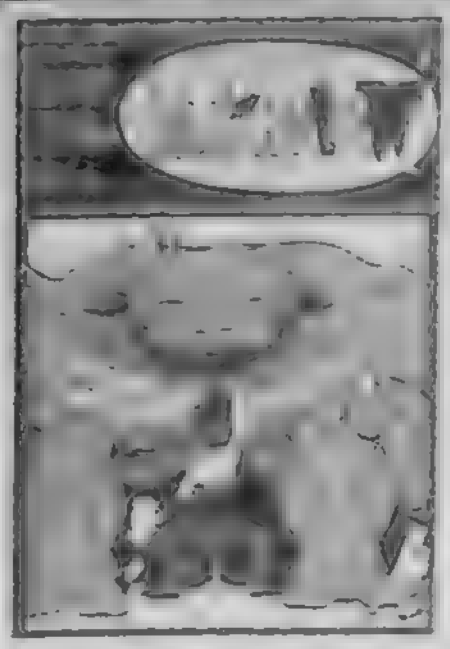

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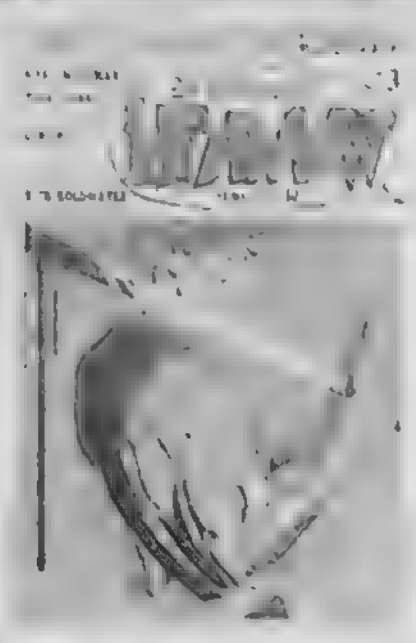

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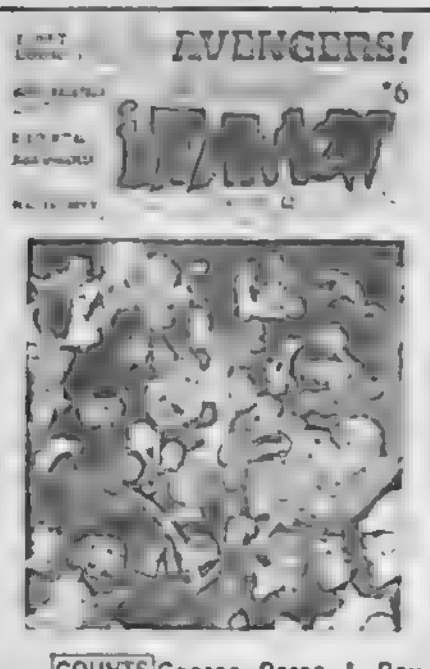

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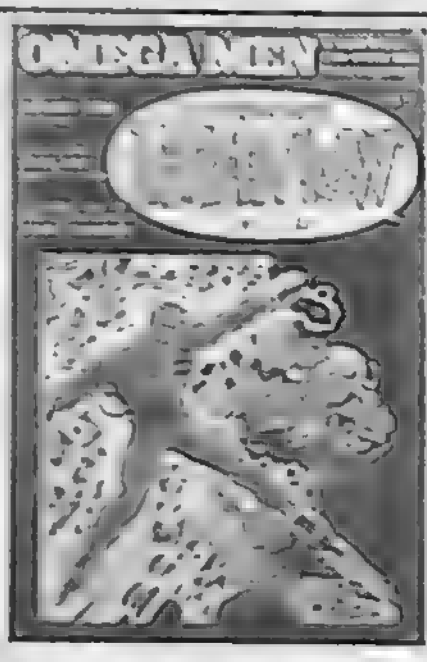

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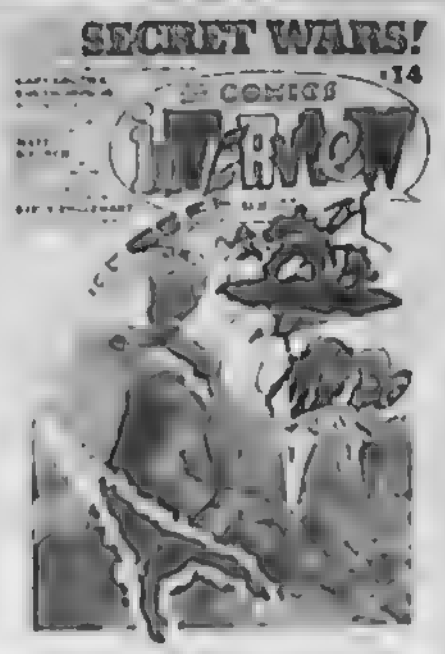

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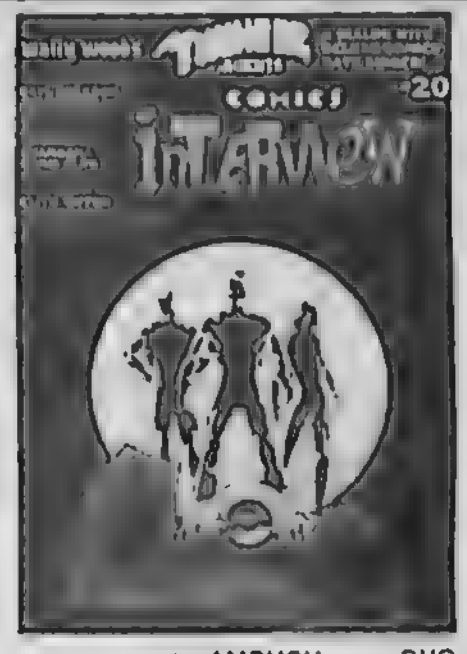

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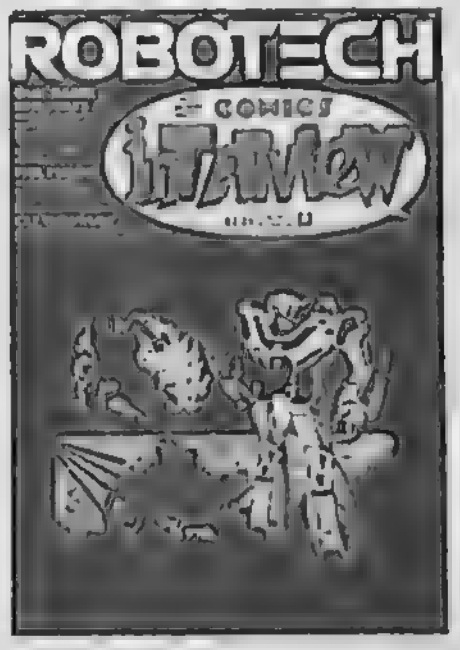

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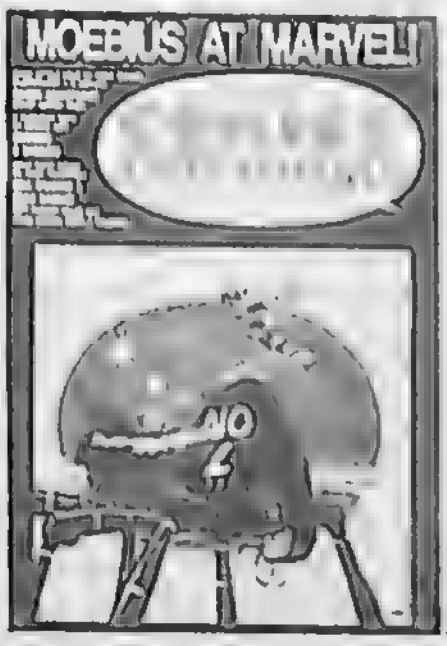

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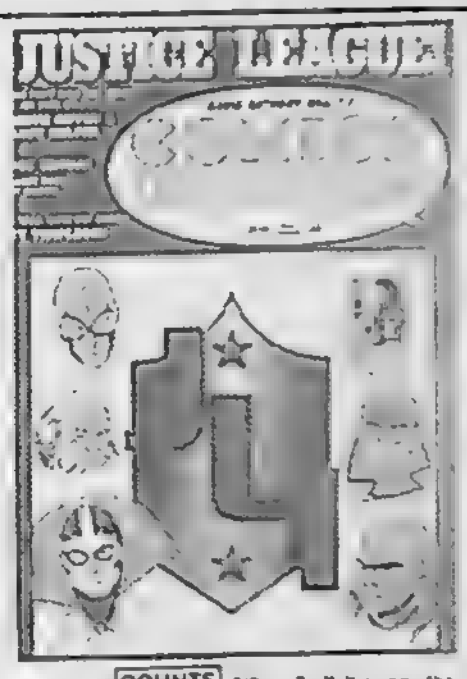

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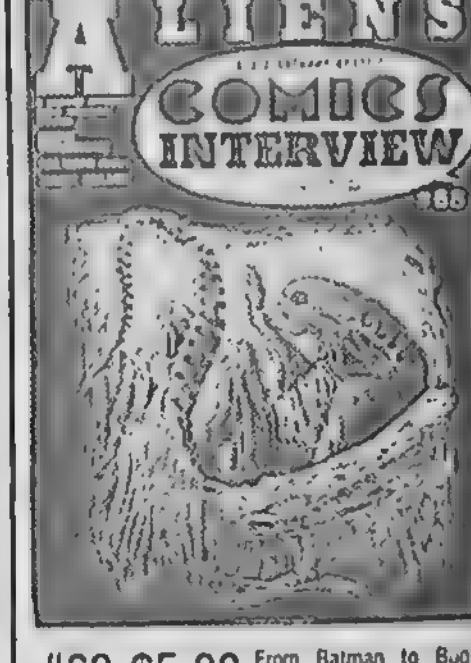

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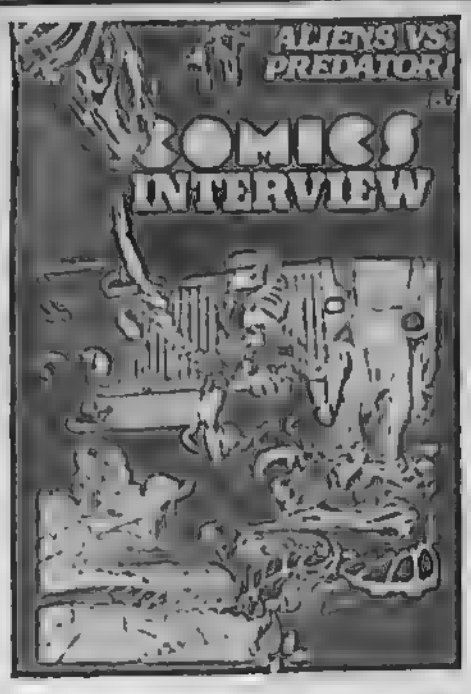

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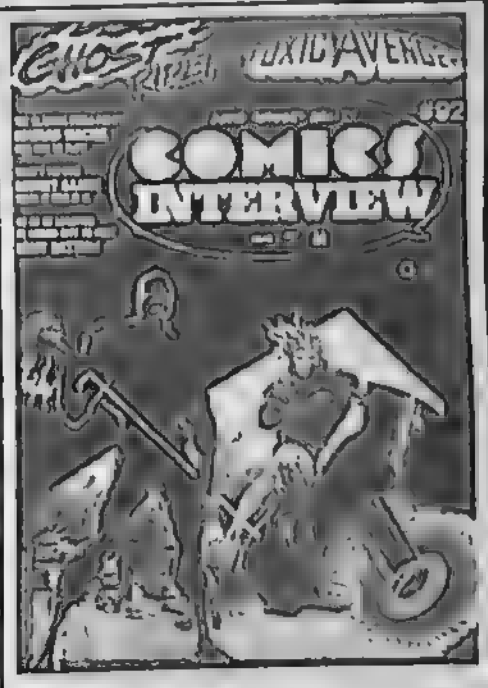

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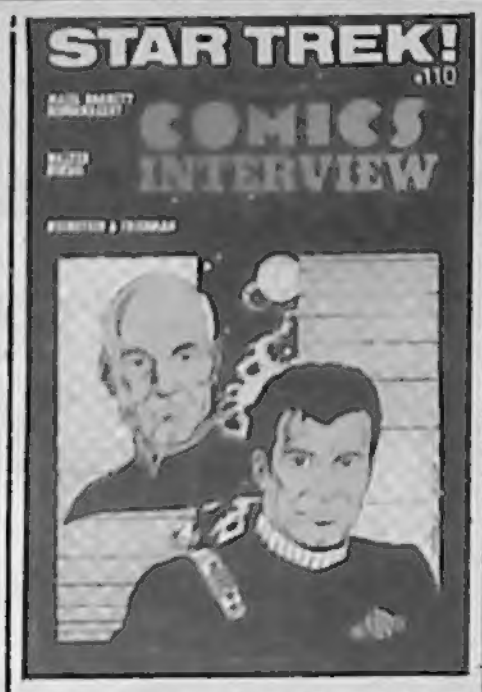

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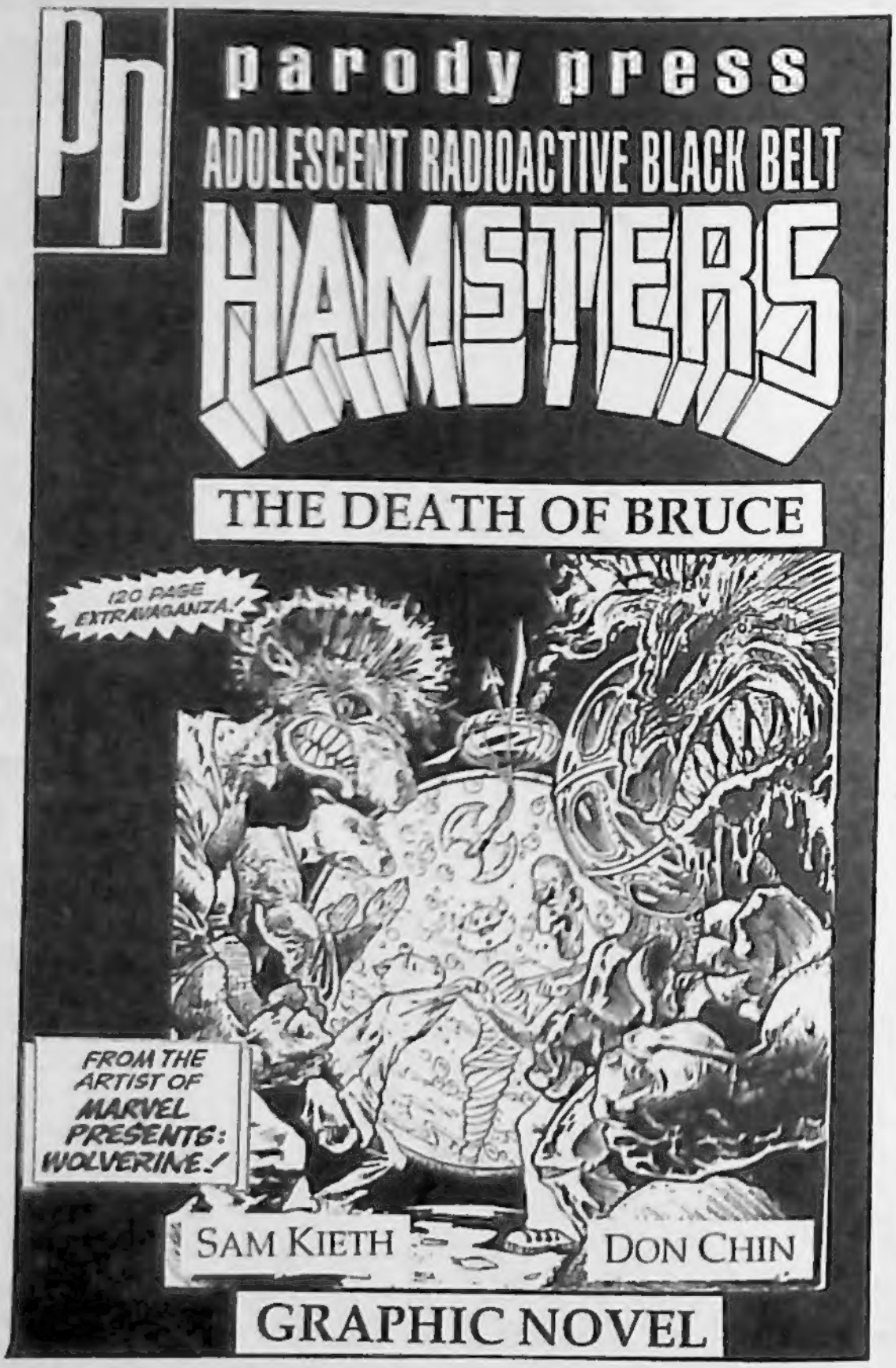

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